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BROKEN SWORD
CHARLES CECIL ON THE SERIES' PAST AND FUTURE

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ALSO INSIDE
- PSP GO
- HOMEBREW
- SAFARI HUNT
- RAPID RELOAD
- HENRY'S HOUSE
- THE BEATLES: ROCK BAND
- STAR TREK: 25 ANNIVERSARY
- STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE

THE MAKING OF CAPTAIN BLOOD
DEEP SPACE, CURIOUS ALIENS AND JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

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BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN
HOW CRITERION TURNED FAILURE INTO SUCCESS

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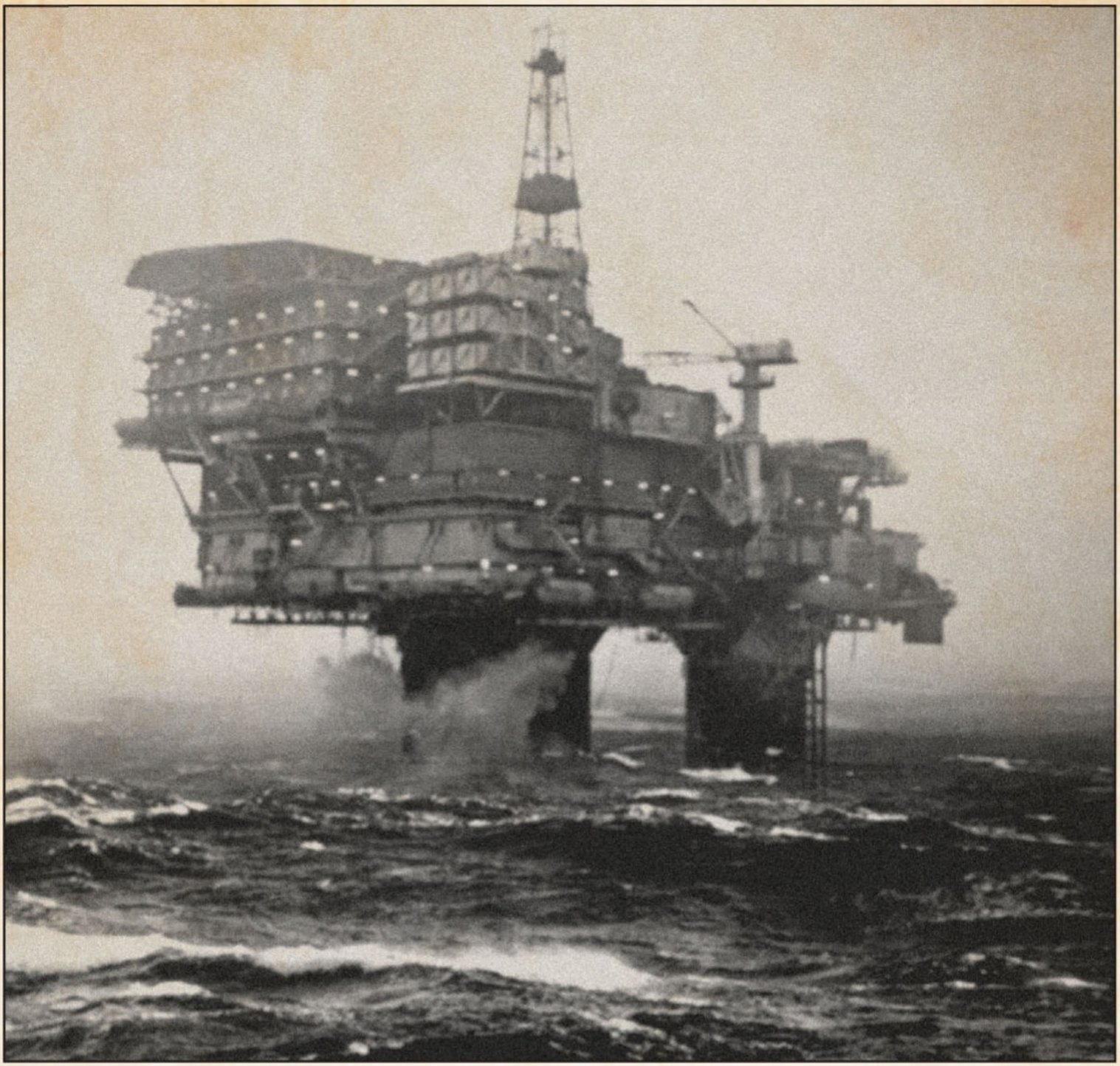

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BEAM SOFTWARE GAME?

DARRAN JONES

I have many fond memories of playing *Horace Goes Skiing* at my friend's house so I'm sticking with that.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Cadence Of Hyrule: Crypt Of The NecroDancer Featuring The Legend Of Zelda*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

Fist II: The Legend Continues because if you hold Restore on the C64 you can walk on air. Just a wee cheat that I've never forgotten.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Dragon's Dogma 2*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

I've long been fond of *Le Mans 24 Hours* for Dreamcast, a really solid racer with absolutely stunning visuals for the time.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *C-Smash VRS*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

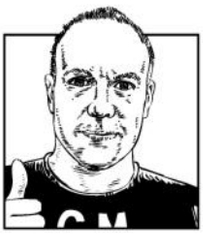
A game I really wanted to play on my Mega Drive was a port of *Shadowrun* on SNES but it sadly never happened.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *Kenshi*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

ANDREW FISHER

Samurai Warrior: The Battles Of Usagi Yojimbo was incredibly atmospheric and had an early good/bad behaviour mechanic.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Thunder Helix*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL ROSE

Mugsy. Even if it is a bit repetitive.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Astro's Playroom*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

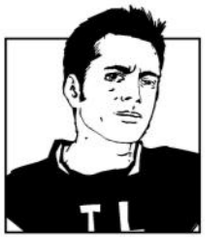


GRAEME MASON

Oooh that's a tough choice between *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* or *The Hobbit*. I'll go for *WOTEF* because of its great crunching sound effects on the Spectrum.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Those Who Remain*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

RORY MILNE

For purely nostalgic reasons I have a soft spot for *The Hobbit*. Some of my fondest memories are of playing it with my dad as a youngster on cold, dark winter evenings.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Gods*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*



IAIN LEE

I just had a look at Melbourne House games and was reminded of the wonder of *Gyroscope* on the BBC. The most infuriating game I have ever played.
Expertise: Buying expensive stuff on eBay then never touching it
Currently playing: *The Stanley Parable*
Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

LOADING...

***Super Metroid* has long been regarded as one of the best games in the series and it's easy to see why.** It combines all the hallmarks of a great Nintendo game and adds an incredible atmosphere, while building on all the tenets that established *Metroid* as such an immersive adventure. It has been a pleasure then to speak to a number of developers that have all been inspired by Nintendo's game over the past 30 years. Some of them have created their own Metroidvanias, while others have made later *Metroid* games, but all have been influenced by the 1994 classic.

Outside of our exhaustive ten-page *Super Metroid* celebration we've also found time to speak to Charles Cecil about Revolution Software's *Broken Sword* series, while Fiona Sperry and Chris Roberts look back at the creation of Criterion's *Burnout 3: Takedown*. Brian Fargo explains what it was like crafting *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary*, while Phil Ulrich recalls the creation of his French sci-fi classic *Captain Blood*.

We've even found time to quiz Mark Cerny about his excellent conversion of *California Games* for Sega's Master System, look at Beam Software's back catalogue with cofounder Alfred Milgrom and ask Justin Wong what it was like to be on the end of Daigo's world-famous parry in *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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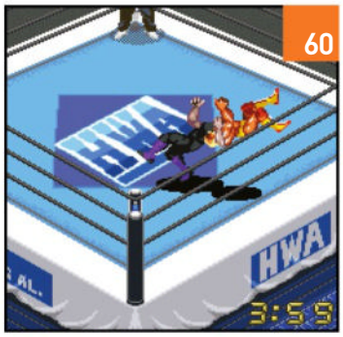
Can you remember the events of October 2007? Nick certainly can



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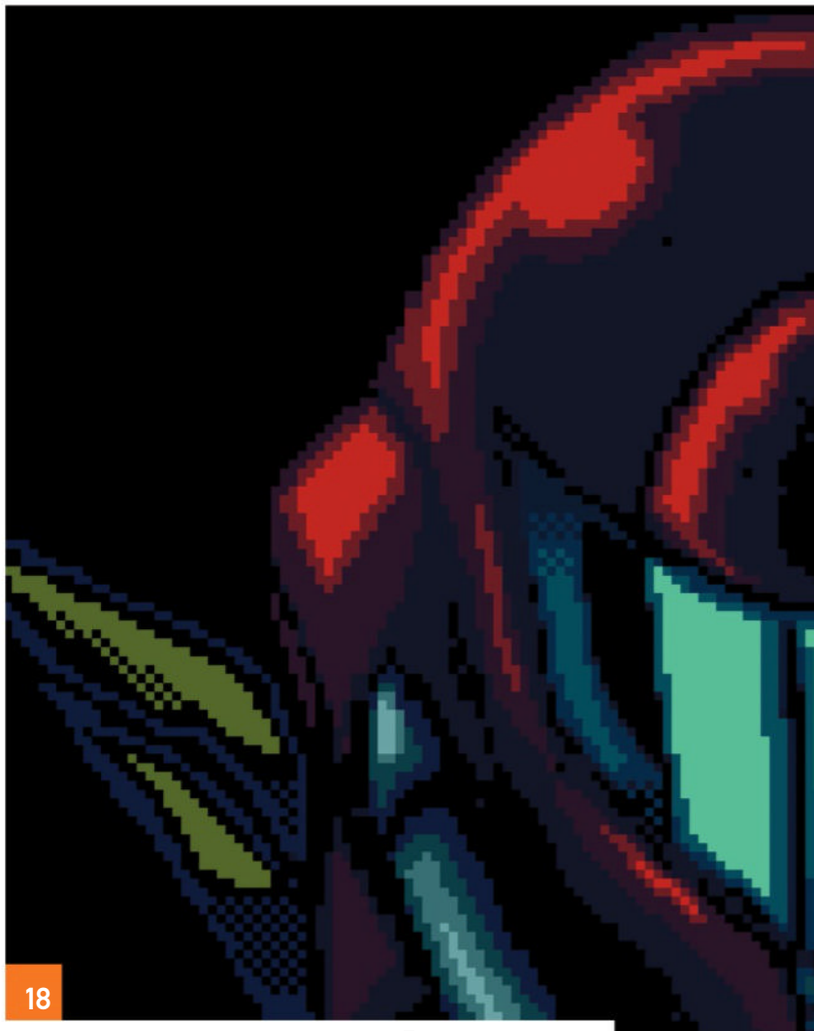

Super Metroid: An Enduring Legacy

Developers of popular Metroidvanias and modern *Metroid* games reveal the impact of Samus Aran's third adventure

Ultimate Guide: California Games

We look at all six fun events and quiz Mark Cerny about his Master System version

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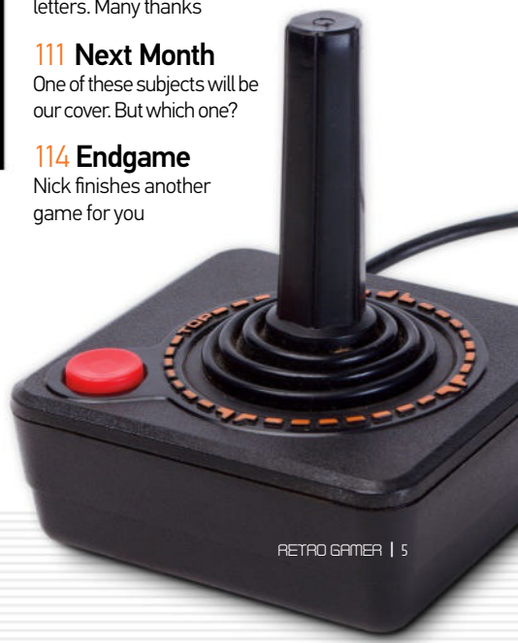
Alfred Milgrom looks at the highs and lows of his popular Australian publishing house



» A Game On visitor enjoys the PC Engine at the São Paulo Art Biennial, in 2017.

GAME ON RETURNS

The videogame history exhibition visits Edinburgh this summer

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Dr Geoff Belknap on why you should visit this year's Game On

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Our columnist has been playing Sim for the BBC Micro and has been really enjoying it

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It turns out that Paul's not really one for playing games online

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We speak to Mike Diver about his brand-new retro books

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
We've only gone and lost Nick. He was last seen investigating October 2007. Have you seen him?

» A younger player learns the joys of *Tetris* on an arcade cabinet in São Paulo.

Over two decades after it became the first museum to host the Barbican's touring videogame history exhibition Game On, The National Museum Of Scotland in Edinburgh is preparing to host it once again from 29 June to 3 November. The interactive experience has attracted millions of visitors in 24 cities worldwide, and allows visitors to get their hands on over 100 games, from handhelds and consoles to arcade cabinets.

"We were the first site outside of London to take on Game On, so we're very excited for it to return to us more than 22 years later," says Dr Geoff Belknap, keeper of science and technology at the museum. "Gaming is a really important subject for us, and has been really exciting for our audiences over the last 20 years. So much has changed in the games industry, particularly Scotland's role in the games industry in the last 20 years that we thought it was really time now to revisit Game On and to highlight everything that's happened, as well as give the opportunity for visitors to come and play their way through videogame history."

» Lara Croft greets attendees at the Tekniska Museet in Stockholm, in 2013.

The Game On exhibition is updated every time it appears, and in this case the National Museum Of Scotland is highlighting local connections to gaming. "Scotland has a really strong place to play in the games industry, both for the UK and globally, and obviously, as the National Museum Of Scotland our remit is to tell stories that are particularly relevant to makers and audiences within Scotland themselves," Geoff tells us. "Most people will know about *Grand Theft Auto* and Rockstar's relevance to Scotland, but people might not be as aware of some of the other great games companies that are working around Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and the rest of Scotland."

While the contributions of Scottish developers behind the scenes are naturally an important part of the exhibition, so too is representation of Scotland on the screen. "Throughout the whole exhibition, any opportunity to highlight a game was made here, or there is Scottish landscape represented or Scottish characters, we're creating a trail throughout the exhibition that highlights that

» Arcade machines at Game On in Oslo, 2016 – which one would you be playing first?

» The ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 sit side by side at the Ontario Science Center in Toronto, 2013.

for visitors who want to know more about where Scotland is represented throughout all of these historic games," Geoff explains.

As for what you can play at the event, Geoff says to expect, "A whole range of very early games through to the iconic and famous games – you will be able to play *Mario*, you will be able to play *Pokémon*, *Tomb Raider*, *Sonic* etc. But we're also highlighting some games made in different places internationally that our audiences might be aware of, but might be less aware of." Whether you want to get some time with an Amiga or Commodore 64, or just spend some time playing multiplayer *GoldenEye*, you should be well catered for.

» A visitor gives the original *Tomb Raider* a go in Stockholm, back in 2013.

» Players of all ages enjoy the exhibition at the Life Science Centre in Newcastle. Photo credit: Richard Kenworthy, 2015.

Of course, the exhibition doesn't just focus on older games. "More recent examples like *Horizon Zero Dawn* will be playable as well as classics – you can play *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, which I still love, you can play *Elite*, you can play *The Legend Of Zelda*," enthuses Geoff. "If your thing is classic arcades, then there'll be a whole section dedicated to arcades." Additionally, the exhibition doesn't just celebrate the success stories in gaming. "If you want to come play the classic flops like *ET* or if you want to come and play Nintendo Virtual Boy, there's also going to be opportunities for that," Geoff adds.

How about events? "We're still finalising that programme, but there will be a whole range of events throughout the whole summer and into the autumn," says Geoff. "So obviously, we will have events throughout the Edinburgh Fringe, there is very likely to be a late [event] for 18-plus, there'll be family days, there'll be opportunities to come in and play with a whole range of people outside of the exhibition itself. And we are hoping to bring in some Scottish games makers.

"It's a very exciting exhibition and I think people are going to absolutely love it. If they came 20 years ago, then they will have just as much of a fun time, but with much more updated content and lots of different types of games to play." If you're planning a visit, please visit nms.ac.uk/gameon for tickets or more information.

» No HDMI output on the EXP-R means you won't be able to hook it up to your TV like you could with the original EXP.

EVERCADE EXPANDS

It's all change for Evercade, as Blaze has announced a number of new products. First up, a new Giga Cart format has been announced – higher capacity cartridges retailing at £22.49, compared to £17.99 for a standard cartridge. According to Blaze, the new format is "designed specifically for larger and more modern retro games, mostly originally released on CD". *Tomb Raider Collection 1*, comprising Lara Croft's first three adventures is the first Giga Cart to be announced. A standard cart featuring 11 Thalamus games was also revealed.

Two new pieces of hardware replace the Evercade VS and EXP this July – the Evercade VS-R has a new grey and turquoise colour scheme but is otherwise similar to the VS, and will come bundled with one controller and *Tomb Raider Collection 1* for £89.99. The Evercade EXP-R sports the same colour scheme as the VS-R and now sports USB-C charging, but loses the built-in Capcom games and HDMI output of the original EXP. The EXP-R will also include *Tomb Raider Collection 1* and an RRP of £99.99 – £30 less than the previous EXP model.

» We quite like this new colour scheme, there's a touch of Hatsune Miku about it.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Let's play some Sim!

Every now and then I will remember a game that I haven't thought of in a million years and become obsessed with it. The last few weeks I have been completely unable to get *Sim* out of my mind.

Sim came out in 1984 on the BBC Micro and I bet hardly any of you will remember it. Actually, I bet some of you will remember one bit about it and nothing else. The bouncing Channel 4 logos. Yeah, now you got it.

Sim seems to have all but vanished from the internet. There is two minutes of gameplay footage on YouTube and that's about it. A few listings on some old websites and nothing more. And yet I was completely in love with this game. I got it as a Christmas present and was blown away by the cover art. This was of course in the days when the picture on the front looked nothing like the game but was more often than not the image you had floating around while you played it because the graphics weren't any good.

EXCEPT the graphics on *Sim* were amazing. Or so I thought. The few pictures online show that actually they were pretty simplistic and nothing to get too excited about.

> "My brain had done that thing of making something old seem better than it was"

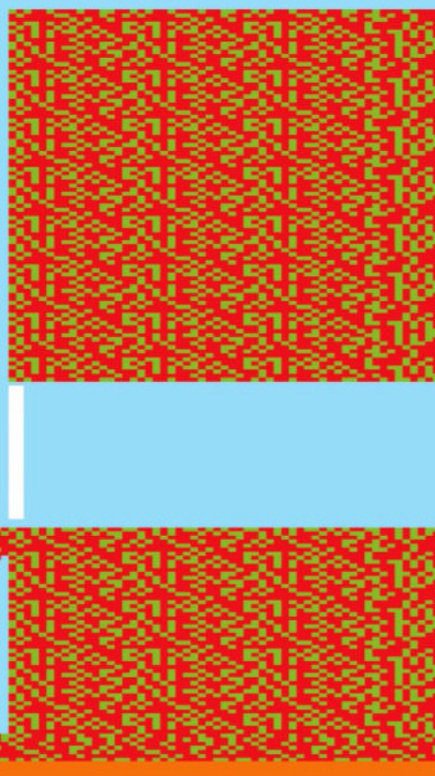
My brain had done that thing of making something old seem better than it was. But wait a minute, there is something special about the way *Sim* looks. It's ridiculously bright and summery and beautiful. It DOES look amazing.

Apart from the Channel 4 logos and the dazzling colours, the thing I most remember is the music. Go and listen to it. It is absolutely wild. A really brilliant tune that to this ADHD brain never gets boring. Each loop is exciting and thrilling and can someone write words to this? I'm not even joking. Now I've just thought of it, that's me done for the next 48 hours as that earworm buries deeper and deeper into my head.

I tracked down Josh Portway who wrote *Sim*. He was very surprised that anyone remembered his game and was suspicious when I told him how much I loved it. He shared how disappointed he was at the rushed Electron version that was impossible to complete and how that really got him down. He also apologised for the BBC version being very punishing in terms of hitting enemies.

One of the best things about the game, and something I didn't know at the time, was that if you completed it, you were presented with a telephone number to call and celebrate. Josh put that there naively thinking maybe a handful of people would see it and even fewer would call. He was wrong. Very wrong. It was his home phone number and as he was only 15 it was really his parent's number. I can imagine they weren't best pleased to deal with hundreds of calls banging on about beating a computer game.

I've played a fair bit of *Sim* this month and if you haven't ever played it, do have a go and let me know how you get on. Is it just me or is this a forgotten classic?



Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Online gaming isn't unreal

The first game I ever played online was *Unreal Tournament*. Up until then I'd always resisted online gaming. In fact, there were very few times I even played single-screen multiplayer games. For sure, we used to huddle around to play *Mario Kart* or *Micro Machines* in the *Digitiser* office. Yes, on a Friday night, after a few beers, my mates and I would try to kill one another in *GoldenEye*.

But… even with games that were supposedly better with two or more players I'd prefer to challenge a CPU opponent. I guess part of it comes from never really being that good at games. Yes, that's an irony for somebody who used to be a professional games journalist, and who now presents a retro gaming magazine show on YouTube… but it's true. I liked to play games my way, in my own time, and make my own mistakes. I never felt a need to prove myself to anyone. I want to get lost in other worlds.

Interacting with real people – even at the end of a railgun – took me away from what I loved most about gaming; it being a solitary experience, wherein I could lose myself from the real world. I have to give enough of my life to other people as it is. Why do that during my downtime? Most other people are awful!

When *Unreal Tournament* was released in 1999, and having more or less avoided the multiplayer-focussed *Quake III: Arena*, I thought I should, finally, see what the fuss was about. As online gaming had become more commonplace, I guess I got wore down. And so, with *Unreal Tournament* I finally decided to shove my toe in the water.

I mean, I'd loved the previous year's *Unreal*. It had a real sense of place and scale, with some beautiful ambient storytelling. Surely *Unreal Tournament* would have found a way to factor some of that in? No. No it didn't.

It was everything I feared it would be. I hated it. Everything I'd loved about *Unreal* had been stripped away – the world, the story, the feeling of exploration, the atmosphere – to be replaced with claustrophobic environments filled with actual people who'd taken the time to 'git gud'. No story, no exploration, just running around hoping not to get shot.

To make matters worse, people loved it. Everyone loved it. Everyone except me. I kept trying. I dabbled in *World Of Warcraft*. I had some genuinely brilliant experiences playing with my friends on assorted *Call Of Duty* games – the closest I ever came to being able to call myself an online gamer. I tried to play *Halo* online, but could never last more than 30 seconds before respawning. I tried and tried, but the appeal of it eluded me. I could see that people loved the whole deathmatch thing, but I couldn't understand why or how.

But this is one of those times I'm happy to say the issue is with me. I can't be alone in preferring single-player games, but I know I'm the minority here in believing that *Unreal Tournament* was a turning point for gaming. To wit: the point at which games changed for the worst.

> "I had some genuinely brilliant experiences playing with my friends on assorted Call Of Duty games"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:
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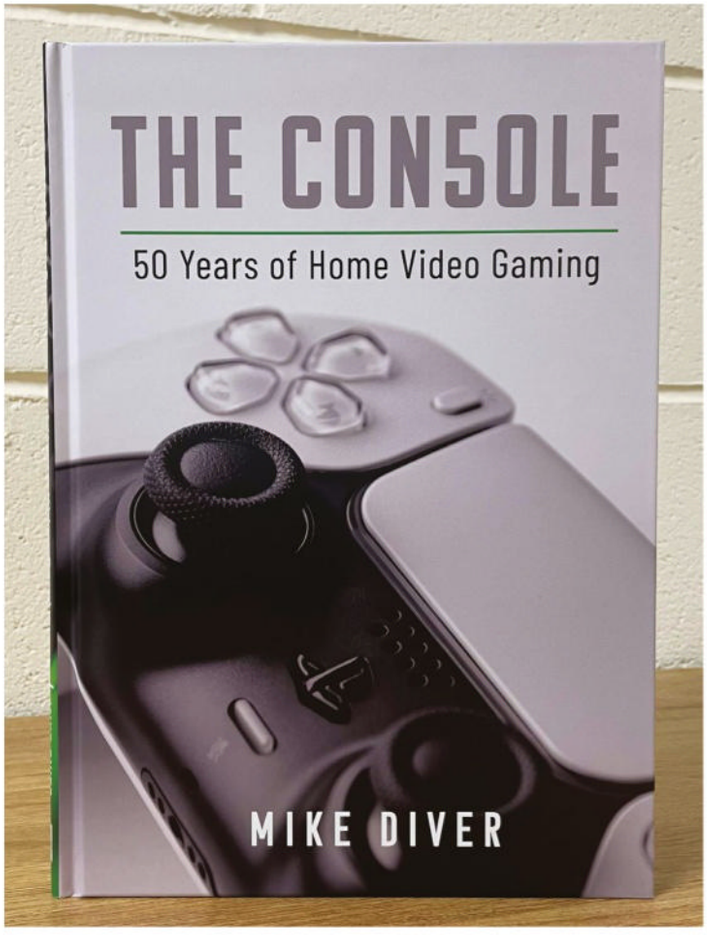


» *The Console: 50 Years Of Home Gaming* is out now in hardback, RRP £28.00.

» The vacuum fluorescent display is a lost art in gaming, which Mike's book seeks to celebrate.

Mike Diver

We find out about the prolific author's latest books

There's a good chance that you're already familiar with Mike Diver's work – he's written for publications including *The Guardian*, *Edge* and **Retro Gamer** and has a variety of gaming books to his name. Now he's back with two brand-new books – *The Console: 50 Years Of Home Gaming* and *From Coin-Ops To Table-Tops: The Essential Electronic Games Book*.

Covering the history of home consoles is a pretty big task. How did you first decide you wanted to tackle that?

I think it's as simple as realising that it was coming up to 50 years of the Magnavox Odyssey and 50 is a nice number, and 5 0 looks a bit like S O and that fits into console, and honestly I think that's probably where the seed started. I've done these kind of overview books before – I did *Retro Gaming* which obviously touched on a lot of older systems, but in more of a pick up and put down sort of way. I wanted to double down on that a little bit and go right through to nowadays, because I think stuff that I couldn't put in *Retro Gaming* around the 360 and the PS3 is really interesting. I think that is a period where those two manufacturers are really, in Microsoft's case, building on the foundation of what they did before and in Sony's case, kind of fumbling it to start with. I suppose unusually, they both kind of ended up on rather level pegging in terms of sales and big games. It felt very even.

Something we were really interested to see was how you really followed through on the consoles, talking about what happened after they were discontinued, like the Jaguar's role in the Coleco Chameleon story.

Yeah, the kind of life after death of systems. I'm sure a retro gamer will have seen the dental equipment modelled after the Jaguar shell. You can't talk about the winners, I don't think, without mentioning some of the losers and when it comes to looking at 50 years of home-console gaming, there's an awful lot that came and went without even making any kind of impact. This doesn't go into the weeds – in a good way, I should say – as much as Lewis Packwood's book does about the weird and wonderful stuff, but I definitely wanted to include those kind of additional versions and uses of technology.

You made the decision to group more minor platforms by theme – for example later on where you talk about streaming platforms, Stadia and Luna.

» Casio PV-1000 fans, rejoice – Mike hasn't ignored your favoured console.

Why did you decide on that approach?
Word counts, and there are a certain number of pages. It really is as simple as that to be honest – I mean with some of them there isn't loads and loads of info out there, and to be honest things like Stadia didn't hang around that long, they are a bit of a footnote. Elsewhere in the book, I made the decision to round up Commodore's consoles. If there was more space to go into detail on those then it would have been nice to, because I'm an apologist for the CD32, but the reality is Commodore made these consoles and none of them did very well. But I didn't want it to be another story of everything being dictated by America and Japan – I know Commodore isn't British or anything, but they found a foothold in Europe and that is what carried through to the CD32.

» *Astro Wars* is a design classic, and benefits from the choice to use all new photography.

You've also got *From Coin-Ops To Table-Tops* coming out soon. How did that book come about?
That really came through Numskull. They're known for their merchandise – Quarter Arcades and lots of fun gaming things, and they came to me. We knew each other a little bit from me covering their stuff elsewhere in the journalistic capacity, and they know I've written books. Would I be interested in doing something on electronic tabletop games? And I'm old enough to have had quite a few of these in the past. I still own some, sadly not as many as I did, which was very annoying. Chris Hill at Numskull is a huge, huge fan of these things, he's got loads of them himself, so him being on the project meant that we had access to a lot of them.

Photography appears to be a big part of the appeal of this book – how much of a challenge was it to put all that together?
Yeah, one of the big things about *From Coin-Ops To Table-Tops* is that it's all original photography, not stock images, so it was a challenge. Some of the ones in the book are mine that travelled up to somewhere near Newcastle to be photographed. Chris had his, other people involved in Numskull had their own ones. Several were bought – there was definitely a budget that went into making sure that the games we wanted to cover looked as good as they could.

Dedicated tabletop games don't always get the most attention, even in dedicated retro gaming circles. How has the reception to the project been?
We went up to Play Expo in Blackpool during the crowdfunding campaign and it was really notable there just how many people were interested in what we're doing. Even friends of mine who aren't super game-y I suppose, when I tell them, "Here's a book that's got *Astro Wars* and *Caveman* and *Scramble*," these are things that resonate with them in a different way, because I guess they're just kind of one and done things, they're proper toys. These things stopped and they do not exist anymore – they are of a moment in gaming history. ✱

Find out more about *The Console: 50 Years Of Home Video Gaming* at pen-and-sword.co.uk, and *From Coin-Ops To Table-Tops* at numskull.com

» This *Pinball Wizard* is from Mike's own collection, and is "one of the noisiest" games.

> "You can't talk about the winners, I don't think, without mentioning some of the losers"
>
> **MIKE DIVER**

» The Nineties spread opens with a look at SNK's excellent and expensive Neo Geo.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

» [Xbox 360] If judged solely on explosions per minute, *Stranglehold* may be the best game ever.

OCTOBER 2007 – Stranglehold attempts to Woo action gamers, EA takes on Animal Crossing and Medal Of Honor parachutes back into the thick of battle. Did you know that Nick Thorpe is allergic to time travel? We did, but he's our only TARDIS operator

NEWS OCTOBER 2007

Virgin Media launched its new channel Virgin One as a direct competitor to Sky One on 1 October, with flagship shows including *The Riches* and *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*. The short-lived channel was sold to Sky in 2010 and closed in 2011. UKTV G2 rebranded to Dave and launched on Freeview on 15 October, an unusual move that proved highly successful – within a month of launch, it was one of the UK's top ten TV stations.

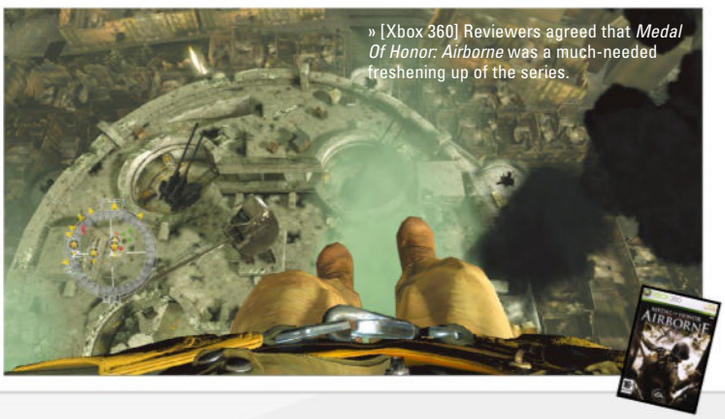
On 18 October, former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto returned to the country after eight years in exile, with the goal of restoring democratic rule in the country. Her convoy was attacked in Karachi on the same night, with two bombs killing 180 and injuring at least 500, Bhutto survived.

A three-way clash for the Formula One World Championship was decided at the Brazilian Grand Prix on 21 October. Lewis Hamilton of McLaren-Mercedes led the standings going into the race, but suffered gearbox problems early on. He recovered to finish seventh and his teammate Fernando Alonso finished third, leaving them both on 109 points – just one behind the winner of the race and Drivers' Championship, Ferrari's Kimi Räikkönen.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 2007

With video rental giant Blockbuster set to sell the high street gaming retailer Gamestation, Game swooped in with a bid for its biggest competitor – though it intended to maintain both brands in the immediate future. "Supermarkets, online brands, entertainment stores, toy outlets and even clothes shops are now selling games and that means healthy competition," said Game's deputy CEO David Thomas, addressing concerns from *games™* that the move would be bad for consumers. The company would have a bigger test ahead in convincing the Competition Commission of its position, though as *games™* noted, online retail was a growth area and both Game and Gamestation "still trail the two biggest operators, Amazon and Play.com, by a wide margin".

One of the most intriguing games of the month was *Stranglehold*, a sequel to John Woo's classic film *Hard Boiled*, with Chow Yun Fat reprising his role as Tequila Yuen. *Official PlayStation Magazine* described it is a "big-fisted, thick-necked arcade shooter that never stops entertaining" and noted "the obvious similarity to *Max Payne*'s slo-mo bullet ballet", giving it 8/10. *PC Gamer* was critical of the game's length, advising players "do a chapter a day – then it will last you a week" in an 80% review. *Official Xbox 360 Magazine* agreed that it was "big, dumb fun" but "short and sweet" and gave it 8/10.



» [Xbox 360] Reviewers agreed that *Medal Of Honor: Airborne* was a much-needed freshening up of the series.

If you preferred shooting of the first-person variety, *Medal Of Honor: Airborne* cast you as a World War II paratrooper, allowing you to drop into open stages. *Edge* noted that "levels lose the false drama of scripted sequences" and that "everything that happens in *Airborne*'s dropzones, from shameful deaths to *GI Joe* heroics, feels like it's because of you, and it usually is", giving the game 7/10. Other scores included 88% from *PC*

Gamer, 8/10 from *games™*, 8/10 in *X360*, 4/5 in *360* and 7/10 in *Official Xbox Magazine*.

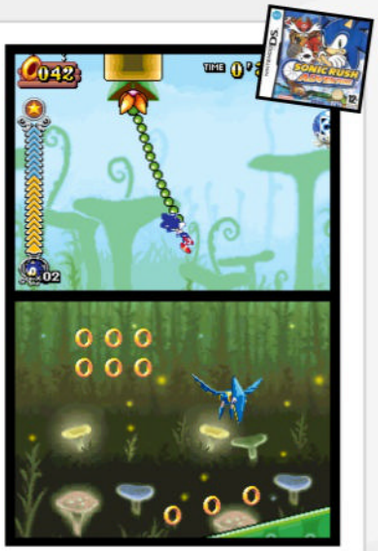
Those left unsatisfied could try *Space Giraffe*, an abstract downloadable shooter for the Xbox 360. "Behind the confusing surface the basics are quite simple," said *Edge*, which felt that the game offered a "hypnotic, sometimes blinding thrill" – though it did note that "bullets can occasionally get lost in the psychedelic background". That was good for an 8/10 score, and *360* gave it 4/5 too, saying that it "delivers an instant jolt of old-school arcading goodness".

PS3 owners could engage in some vehicle-based blasting instead, in the online multiplayer revival of *Warhawk*. In a 4/5 review, *games™* praised the game for having "tightly designed maps, beautifully cool visuals, engaging and satisfying combat" and highlighted the ability for up to four players per console to join the action as "the type of connectivity we like to see". *Edge* gave the game 8/10, *Play* scored it 84% and *OPM* 9/10. It was a particularly welcome arrival as the heavily hyped PS3 exclusive *Heavenly Sword* had underwhelmed, scoring 71% in *Play*, 7/10 in *OPM* and 6/10 in both *Edge* and *games™* – the latter declaring it "more Kramer than Kratos".

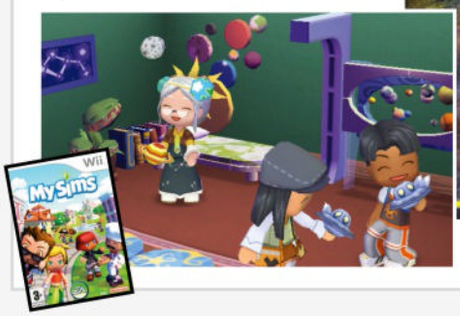
The surprise package of the month was *MySims*, a branch of EA's popular series designed for the Nintendo consoles. *Official Nintendo Magazine* noted that it "takes all the really fun elements from *Harvest Moon*, *Animal Crossing* and *The Sims*", but considered it better than those games "in almost every way", scoring it 94%. Long loading times and slightly fiddly controls were highlighted by *nRevolution*, but it still gave the game 8.8/10, opining that, "No other Wii title is as light-hearted or creatively empowering as this." The DS version of the game was also well received, earning 86% from *ONM* and 8.4/10 from *nRevolution*.

Also on the DS, *Sonic Rush Adventure* polarised opinion. The platform sequel earned 92% from *Official Nintendo Magazine*, which felt that the boss battles "get more creative and clever as you progress" and praised the amount of additional challenges beyond the main quest. However, *nRevolution* gave it just 7.0/10, as it felt that the game offered "a fantastic and fun set of levels that hardly stray from the dizzy heights of the original", but criticised the need to gather materials for boating, an "odd, cumbersome minigame" required for progress that "feels like it's getting in the way rather than enhancing the experience".

Want to see if exclusives *Halo 3*, *Lair* and *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* lived up to the hype? Join us again next month, then.



» [DS] Swinging from a vine? Donkey Kong's about to sue Sonic for some heavy duty gimmick infringement.



» [Wii] This screenshot takes Nick back to his days of teaching science. Dark days, those.

» [PS3] Not mincing words about the PS3 library, *games™* declared, "Finally, there's something for people to play."

CHARTS

OCTOBER 2007

PLAYSTATION 3

1 – **Resistance: Fall Of Man** (Sony)
2 – **The Darkness** (2K Games)
3 – **Fantastic 4: Rise Of The Silver Surfer** (2K Games)
4 – **Transformers: The Game** (Activision)
5 – **F1 Championship Edition** (Sony)

WII

1 – **Wii Play** (Nintendo)
2 – **Big Brain Academy: Wii Degree** (Nintendo)
3 – **Mario Party 8** (Nintendo)
4 – **Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition** (Capcom)
5 – **Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07** (EA)

PC

1 – **World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade** (Blizzard)
2 – **The Sims 2: Seasons** (EA)
3 – **The Sims 2** (EA)
4 – **Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars** (EA)
5 – **The Complete Collection Of The Sims** (EA)

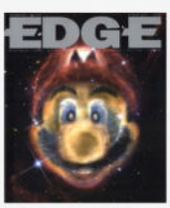
MUSIC

1 – **About You Now** (Sugababes)
2 – **Let Me Think About It** (Ida Corr vs Fedde Le Grand)
3 – **No U Hang Up/If That's OK With You** (Shayne Ward)
4 – **Ayo Technology** (50 Cent/Timberlake/Timbaland)
5 – **Hey There Delilah** (Plain White T's)

THIS MONTH IN...

PSU3

Though a next month page promises more to come, this issue is *PSU3*'s last. In a statement, Imagine Publishing notes that the PlayStation magazine market "has not seen the significant growth shown by Xbox 360 titles".



Edge

"My taste in games is becoming increasingly at odds with the tastes of the masses," says Mr Biffo. "*The Darkness* is awful, and now I feel like the lone boy in the crowd shouting that he can see the Emperor's balls."

games™

"I disagree with your argument that XBL is the best online service," writes John Bilcliff. "Microsoft charges to use Live Gold, and to remain competitive with Sony and Nintendo it must surely stop." We'll see how that pans out…

Henry's House

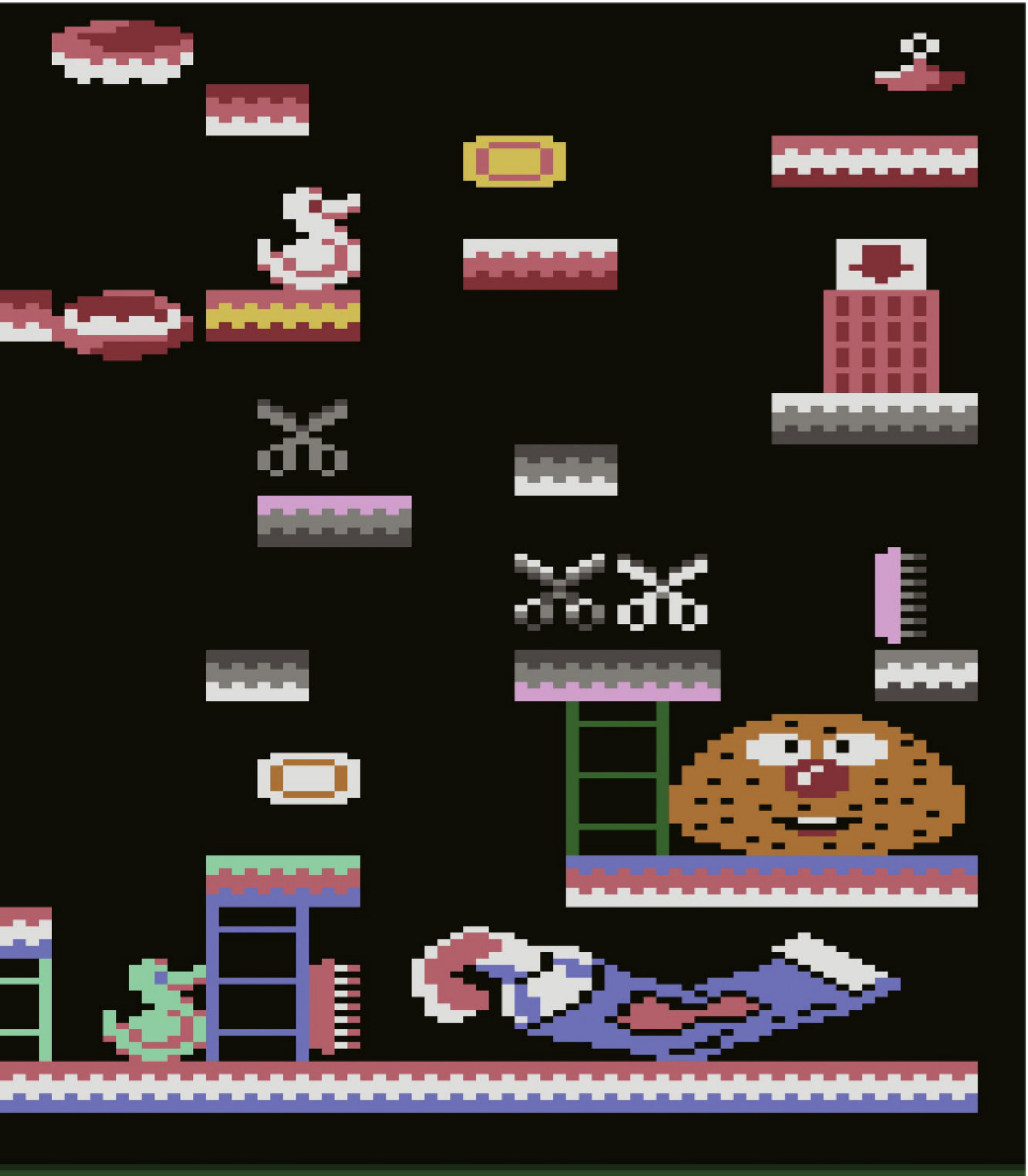
LETHAL LIVING SPACE

» ATARI 8-BIT » 1987 » CHRIS MURRAY

Online social media platforms have a lot to answer for. It's lovely to be able to chat about classic games with like-minded folks, but occasionally I do encounter some bugbears, and one of them is how some American gamers can be very dismissive of home-computer platforms, and particularly European games. I recently saw someone talking about the idea of getting into Amiga games "with a hazmat suit", and it's a bit frustrating to see the foundation of our hobby reduced to jokes about the use of water dripping from the ceiling as a hazard.

However, I ended up mentally returning to those discussions this month because of one game on The 400 Mini. *Henry's House* is a pretty typical single-screen platformer of the era – it's quite colourful, well animated, definitely a bit surreal and clearly draws inspiration from the likes of *Donkey Kong* and *Miner 2049er*. It's also rock hard, demanding very precise jumps right from the start of the game. The first time I played it, I died when jumping into the crown on the first stage, which I had thought was merely decorative. I also died touching a wall.

It turns out that just about everything in *Henry's House* is absolutely deadly. While that makes some level of sense given that Henry has been shrunk to a mere six inches in height, I'm not sure it justifies what you see in this screenshot, where Henry has lost a life by touching an ordinary household tap. Does this make *Henry's House* a bad game? No, I don't think it does – to me, it actually makes the whole experience rather funny – but the experience of playing the game did honestly cause me to reconsider my stance towards the online commentators I mentioned earlier. There's no excuse for being dismissive, but given some of the things that Eighties devs chose as killer obstacles, you can kind of see their point.


NRYS 01 ROOM 02

SUPER METROID

AN ENDURING LEGACY

AS NINTENDO'S SCI-FI CLASSIC TURNS 30 WE REVISIT THE PLANET ZEBES AND SPEAK TO DEVELOPERS OF BOTH METROIDVANIAS AND ACTUAL METROID GAMES TO LEARN WHAT MAKES SAMUS ARAN'S 2D ADVENTURE SO SPECIAL

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

We've always found Metroidvania to be an odd term, largely because adventures like *Aztec, The Maze Of Galious* and *Nodes Of Yesod* existed long before both *Metroid* and *Castlevania*. It was arguably *Metroid* that helped crystallise the concept for many gamers though and that concept was largely refined and perfected in 1994. The game in question is *Super Metroid*, Yoshio Sakamoto's hugely ambitious sequel, which would not only take full advantage of the Super Nintendo's extra power, but would serve as an end to the story arc that had first begun with the 1987 Famicom Disk release of *Metroid* and continued with *Metroid II: Return Of Samus* on Nintendo's Game Boy. We'd also argue that it's probably the *Metroid* game most gamers think of whenever the term Metroidvania comes up.

While it's well known that the *Metroid* series was heavily influenced by Ridley Scott's *Alien* it could be argued that *Super Metroid* is perhaps the most cinematic of Samus' early adventures. "When I first heard the words, 'The last Metroid is in captivity, the galaxy is at peace,' it was a huge surprise," admits Darren Kerwin, founder of the popular *Metroid* website Shinesparkers. "Up until this point, I hadn't heard much voice acting in a SNES game, and those words spoken by Dan Owsen, made the game's opening highly memorable."

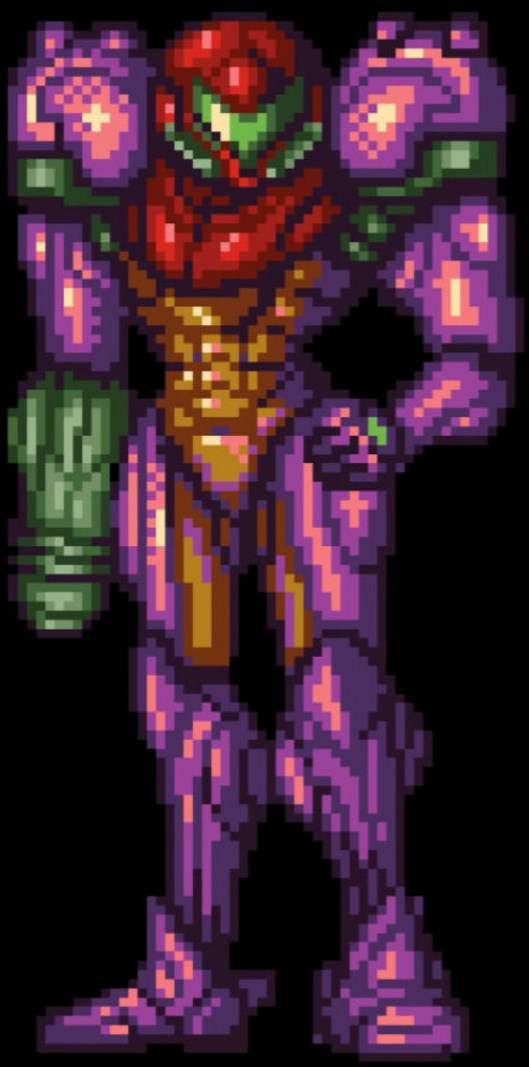
Darren's point about *Super Metroid*'s cinematic feel is an interesting one, because while it does indeed feature that memorable opening, recalling Samus' earlier exploits by using text and black-and-white stills, the rest of the story is cleverly told in-game. "On release, it was *Super Metroid*'s storytelling that really stood out to me," remembers Derek Yu, creator of the *Spelunky* games and the Metroidvania *Eternal Daughter*. "I still find it impressive how much narrative the game is able to convey with such few words – after the brief introduction you rarely lose control of Samus. And the feeling of tension and mystery never lets up until you finally escape from Zebes."

Super Metroid reviewed extremely well with critics who all made note of its exceptional atmosphere and neat game mechanics. *Nintendo Magazine System* called it, "A perfectly designed game with negligible flaws," in its 92% review. *Super Play* was equally enthused stating, "The game's singular most remarkable feature is the atmosphere," with the team's import review ending with another 92%. In a 5/5 *GamePro* review Slasher Quan said that "visually *Super Metroid* sets a wonderfully appropriate and dark mood", and also praised *Super Metroid*'s audio saying it was "fairly sombre and subdued, yet really cool at the same time".

Thomas Happ, creator of *Axiom Verge* and its sequel also remembers the impact Nintendo's game had on him. "I was in high school at the time. I was really excited to play a 24 megabit game because it indicated it would be huge. Of course I loved it and replayed it multiple times until I could get the fastest time and 100% items (though I don't think I did both at once)." Thomas also mentioned the atmosphere that impressed so many critics on release. "I'd say it's crucial. Say you took the same gameplay but reskinned everything to look and sound like *Yoshi's Island*; it would still be fun to play but it wouldn't have the same resonance as the kind of creepy sci-horror feel of *Metroid*. The winding maze-like structure hits your brain in a similar place as eerie synth music and abandoned alien corridors."

Tim Longo has been designing games since the late-Nineties and also feels *Super Metroid*'s rich atmosphere is one of its key successes. "It has a very unique and special version of science fiction," he begins. "Like *Zelda* and *Mario*, there is almost nothing else out there like it in tone. Still to this day, even. It isn't too dark, but it isn't too cartoony. It has a great science-fiction feel, but somehow stands on its own. I think [Nintendo has] never been afraid of sticking with that retro sci-fi feel in the face of ▶

"ON RELEASE, IT WAS SUPER METROID'S STORYTELLING THAT REALLY STOOD OUT TO ME"
DEREK YU



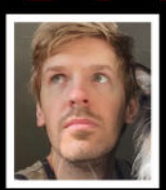
THE INTERVIEWEES

CASS KING
Guacamelee! 2

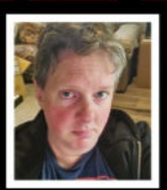
SIMON ANDERSON
Owlboy, Vikings On Trampolines

DEREK YU
Eternal Daughter, Spelunky

TIM LONGO
Tomb Raider: Anniversary



IAN CAMPBELL
Guacamelee! 2, Bleed



THOMAS HAPP
Axiom Verge, Axiom Verge 2

JACOBO LUENGO GOMEZ
Metroid: Samus Returns

JACK MATHEWS
Metroid Prime Trilogy

» [SNES] Here's a great example of *Super Metroid*'s world design. Fire a Super Missile into the ceiling and enemies will drop to the floor.

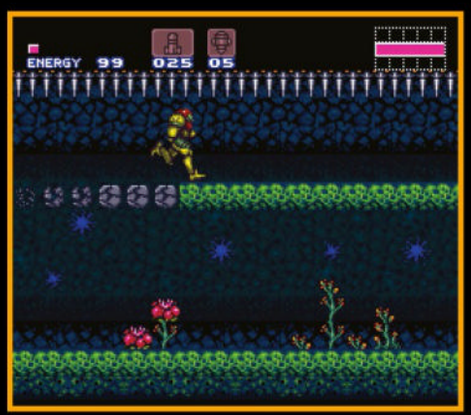
» [SNES] Samus' early encounter of Ridley is a good example of the foreshadowing that's littered throughout *Super Metroid*.

» [SNES] If you shoot these Firefleas the room will darken, potentially plunging Samus in near darkness and possible danger.

so many sci-fi trends that they could have adopted or chased. All of that was established in *Super Metroid*, really."

As mentioned earlier, *Super Metroid* refines the elements that *Metroid* introduced to many gamers. The additional power of the Super Nintendo also meant Nintendo's sequel was aesthetically superior in every possible way. When Samus touches down on Zebes audio is kept to a minimum with only driving rain and the occasional crack of lightning to be heard, but it soon builds into some wonderfully eerie tunes as Samus explores (see the Aural Excellence panel). The different areas of Zebes in *Metroid* may have been colour coded, but they're been significantly enhanced graphically for the 16-bit sequel meaning that every area is now instantly recognisable as Samus explores – from the lush, populated jungles of Upper Brinstar to the volcanic-strewn areas of Norfair and the stark metallic corridors found throughout Wrecked Ship.

In many ways *Super Metroid*'s locations are every bit as memorable as the creatures that reside in them and it's not been lost on Jacobo Luengo Gomez who has worked on both *Metroid: Samus Returns* and *Metroid Dread*. "Environments are a crucial character within the game. They are not limited to being a mere excuse for you to go from one place to another, but each one tells their own story and has their reason for existing. Why is there a big broken glass pipe?



» [SNES] Referred to as the noob bridge, this is an early trap. If you're not using the dash button this will be impossible to cross.

Who or what has destroyed it? Could I do the same if I had enough power? This gives them a unique identity while as a player it helps you draw a road map despite the large size of the map."

> "I WAS REALLY EXCITED TO PLAY A 24 MEGABIT GAME BECAUSE IT INDICATED IT WOULD BE HUGE"
> THOMAS HAPP

Those distinctive environmental markers are also mentioned by Drinkbox Studios' Ian Campbell who was lead designer on *Guacamelee! 2*, which has many nods to the *Metroid* series. "In the early-to-mid stages, the game is always subtly guiding you and laying the groundwork for revelations to come," he explains. "At first your movements are restricted in ways you don't often understand or recognise, so the journey feels like your own while making sure you learn and master your abilities. At the same time, you're going through so many memorable locations, you're guaranteed to have flashes of insight one, two, or four hours later as you remember one of them and travel back to discover a new path forward."

Jack Mathews is no stranger to the *Metroid* universe, having worked on all three *Metroid Prime* games. He's well aware of the importance of *Super Metroid*'s environmental game design and it's one of many things you'll see repeated in the *Prime* trilogy. "You're able to have a sense of place anywhere in the game, often without needing to consult the map," he explains. "It makes the world feel lived-in and real." It's an aspect of the game that's shared with *Owlboy*'s creator Simon Anderson. "There's a lot of elements that make *Super Metroid* unique. An emphasis on how it handles the progression of exploration. Maybe the branching mechanics that the upgrades provide, or the captivating setting. But to me, if there's one thing *Super Metroid*, and the *Metroid* series has always excelled at, it is the sense of environmental presence."

Another key aspect of the game's environmental design is not only the creatures that inhabit Zebes, but also how they feel part of an actual ecosystem – something that's further driven home by graphical flourishes like egg sacs, broken cocoons and even dung. Many of them will need to be overcome if Samus wants to complete her mission, but unlike other games of the era it feels like they have a proper purpose here – whether it's to be used as makeshift platforms so Samus can navigate hazardous areas, or to act as pointers for when the bounty hunter gets stuck. The Dachora for example, will visually show Samus how to perform the highly useful Shinespark technique, while a trio of Etecoons will perform the sequence-breaking Wall Jump for her. "Using enemy design and level design to complement each other is also one of my favourite aspects of the game," explains Tim. "Most enemies are quite simple. But used in combination with good level design and environmental design and in combination with other enemy types, it makes for a lot of special and memorable challenges."

If *Super Metroid*'s environment and monster designs are far more ambitious than its predecessors, the same can be said for its gargantuan map, which is surprisingly easy for Samus to navigate. This is mainly due to each area having its own distinct-looking environment, but also due to Nintendo's decision to include a smaller mini-map in the top-right corner of the screen. Switch over to the main map and while it's not as well signposted as more modern Metroidvanias it still offers tantalising glimpses of where you should consider heading to next. It also highlights the numerous save points, boss locations, entry points to new areas and even where most power-ups can be found. Jack feels the map, combined with *Super Metroid*'s world gives gamers, "A longing for continuing exploration, both because of incredible environmental art and atmosphere, and the longing of finding the ability to get you somewhere you are

ARMED ARAN

SAMUS IS ONE HIGH-POWERED BOUNTY HUNTER

CHARGE BEAM
■ Hold down the fire button to deliver a super-charged shot that should finish off most smaller enemies.

ICE BEAM
■ Has the power to freeze most enemies. Continue firing to destroy them, or use their frozen bodies as a makeshift platform.

WAVE BEAM
■ Its unique laser not only dramatically widens your gun's spread range, but also lets you cut through certain obstacles.

SPAZER BEAM
■ This significantly powers up Samus' gun, fires at a much faster rate and features three devastating beams.

PLASMA BEAM
■ The ultimate form of Samus' arm cannon. Particularly useful when going up against those more troublesome foes.

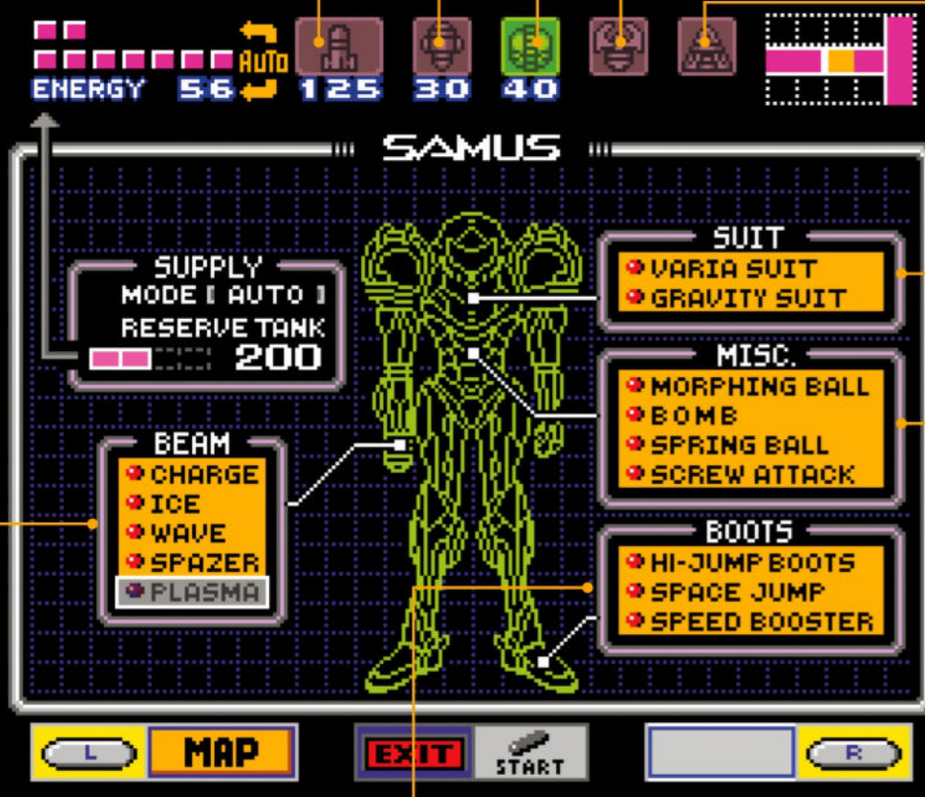
MISSILES
■ These powerful shots will cause significant damage to enemies and will also open red doors if Samus uses five missiles on them.

SUPER MISSILES
■ These chunky bad boys pack a devastating punch. Not only do they open green doors, but they open red doors with a single shot.

POWER BOMB
■ This will rip through and completely obliterate most smaller enemies and will also destroy any breakable walls in the area.

GRAPPLING BEAM
■ Made from pure energy, the Grappling Beam lets you attach to specific blocks so you can navigate otherwise cavernous areas.

X-RAY SCOPE
■ This useful device not only freezes gameplay while it's being used, but also lets you scan around for nearby hidden objects.



VARIA SUIT
■ This fetching orange armour lets Samus withstand super-heated areas of Zebes and take 50% less damage from enemies.

GRAVITY SUIT
■ Grab this natty pink suit and Samus will move through water as gracefully as she does on land. It also grants her an additional 25% protection for a total of 75%.

HI-JUMP BOOTS
■ The *Super Metroid* equivalent of Air Jordans. Strap these boots on and you'll significantly increase your jumping capabilities.

SPACE JUMP
■ It requires some careful timing but once you master this you'll be able to continuously move around areas without ever touching the ground.

SPEED BOOSTER
■ This power-up significantly upgrades your standard dash. You'll run so fast that you can obliterate some enemies and even certain walls.

MORPHING BALL
■ We can't imagine being scrunched into a ball is good for her back but it does allow Samus to enter otherwise inaccessible nooks and crannies

BOMB
■ This versatile weapon can defeat a variety of enemies, reveal new locations and even be used to propel Samus to out-of-the-way areas. Bombs can only be used in your ball form.

SPRING BALL
■ Allows Samus to jump when morphed.

SCREW ATTACK
■ Kill most enemies while somersaulting.

EXPLORING ZEBES

A GUIDE TO THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS SAMUS MUST NAVIGATE

CRATERIA

When Samus first lands on Zebes Crateria is the first area she encounters. Initially she's pounded by driving rain and limited with where she can travel but new areas open up once she discovers the Morphing Ball and begins to explore.

WRECKED SHIP

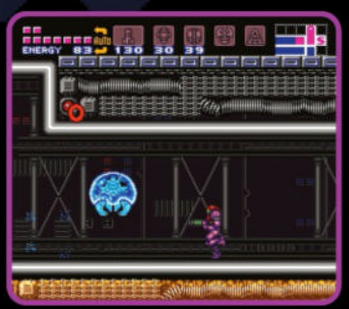
The metallic innards of this downed hulking craft not only sees you dealing with dangerous enemies, but also an annoying power shortage. Killing the boss Phantoon restores power, but adds deadly electrical shorts to the hazards you must avoid.

BRINSTAR

This huge area is essentially split into two distinct environments. Upper Brinstar (affectionately known as Green Brinstar) is a dense jungle filled with exotic plants and deadly wildlife, while Lower Brinstar (or Red Brinstar) is where you'll discover the deadly boss Kraid.

NORFAIR

Populated with deadly pools of lava, Norfair is a dangerous place and is quite hard to navigate until you can acquire the Varia Suit. It's arguably one of the most alien-looking areas of the game thanks to the strange-looking bubbles found there.

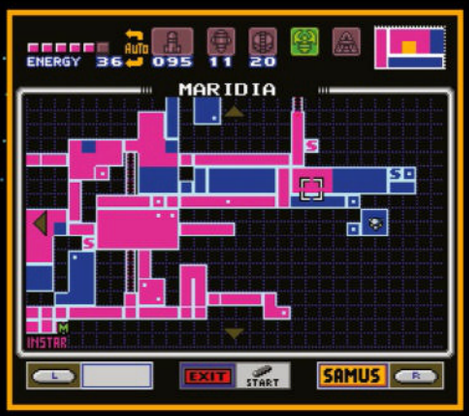


TOURIAN

This is the heart of the Space Pirates' operations and it's filled with ominous-looking corridors and areas of superheated lava. Navigate these obstacles and you'll eventually face off against Mother Brain. Good luck!

MARIDIA

Like Norfair, this aquatic area becomes a lot easier to traverse once you're acquired Samus' relevant suit (in this case, the Gravity Suit). It's also one of the most colourful areas of the game thanks to several sandy locations and a lot of exotic flora.



» [SNES] Blue areas are locations you haven't yet explored, while dots represent power-ups and useful areas. Annoyingly, these dots stay on the map even when you've collected the item.

not able to go." For Tim, *Super Metroid*'s map offers, "A clear and logical sense of progression through the world. *Super Metroid* is one of our best examples of allowing players to feel like they are discovering the world as they go but really the design is pushing them to where it wants them to go as well."

> "I THINK EXPLORATION IS THE CORNERSTONE OF EVERY GOOD METROIDVANIA"
> JACOBO LUENGO GOMEZ

While you can visit Map Rooms to get a better understanding of each new area of Zebes you're visiting, areas are never fully revealed, meaning that exploration is a core component of Nintendo's game and a massive part of its appeal.

"Exploration in *Super Metroid* has a strong feeling of tension and big moments of relief," offers Cass King, a *Guacamelee! 2* designer at Drinkbox Studios. "There are many paths to explore and you don't know exactly where to go. Anything could be around the corner, from small power-ups and new abilities to rooms with a dangerous encounter, boss, or a save point."

Super Metroid's focus on exploration is also keenly felt by Jacobo who tells us, "I think exploration is the cornerstone of every good Metroidvania and what makes them really compelling compared to other action adventure games. Entering blindly into an unknown world, unveiling the map little by little with each small advance, unlocking shortcuts and secret paths, and ending up dominating each of the corners is a unique sensation. In *Super Metroid*, the oppressive atmosphere and sense of loneliness contribute to creating a feeling of constant tension as you explore, tension that later turns into exhilaration and relief when you finally obtain a new ability, gain access to a new area, or defeat one of the imposing bosses."

While *Super Metroid*'s design can often feel intimidating and sprawling, returning to previous areas never feels like it's a slog or an artificial attempt to extend the game's length. "*Super Metroid* is a world design masterpiece, with what is often described as an 'invisible hand' that guides you by progressively locking and unlocking the world of Zebes to the player so they would still be able to figure out the way forward without any direct instructions," offers Glaedrax, another member of Shinesparkers. "There is a lot of backtracking in this game, but it's rarely ever a chore due to how much easier it becomes to navigate through the zones as you collect the various power-ups scattered around the planet and unlock shortcuts and elevators."

Speaking of power-ups, it's time to discuss Samus' impressive arsenal (see the Armed Aran panel). Despite starting directly after *Metroid II: Return Of Samus*, the bounty hunter retains very few of her powers when she lands on Zebes, even though several are shown in the game's attract sequences. Cass offers an interesting explanation and suggests it could be down to design. "They want to give players a taste of the abilities that Samus will have later in the game. When the player [doesn't have Samus' key abilities], they can feel their absence which makes getting them feel even better. It's also delightful when you get a new upgrade that Samus didn't start with at the beginning of the game." Cass also feels that the loss of these

» [SNES] Kraid is one of the first bosses Samus encounters and it puts up quite the fight.

» [SNES] Although Samus' Morphing Ball will let you access small nooks and crannies it still has its limitations in where it can go.

» [SNES] Weapons can serve many purposes in *Super Metroid*, here missiles are being used to open a red door.

abilities early in the game helps fill in some of the missing story narrative. "Samus is supposed to be a skilled bounty hunter, so she should arrive on Zebes prepared with an arsenal of weapons. When she [doesn't have] her powers, it makes her feel even more badass as the player earns her powers back and some new powers than what she started with. This creates a strong connection between the player and Samus as a character that dialogue or cutscenes alone never could."

> "I REALLY LOVE THAT THERE'S A PALPABLE SENSE OF BUILDUP, LONG BEFORE YOU REACH A BOSS"
> SIMON ANDERSON

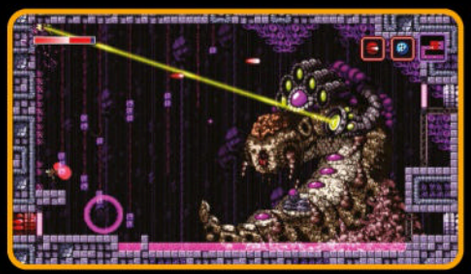
Another key strength of Samus' arsenal is that they're not just used to destroy enemies, but offer other purposes, from opening doors to solving puzzles. "The way that this game turns mechanics into effective tools for the player to overcome not just enemies, but the world, is the cornerstone to the genre," explains Tim. "It will always feel good to the player because they will feel that a weapon or new ability they found isn't just about killing things in front of them but it is also about feeling clever figuring out how to use it to progress." Jacobo also enjoys the multipurpose approach of Samus' weapons and skills. "I like the way the game tempts you to try different uses for Samus' abilities, even the most unexpected ones. For example, when you freeze an enemy and discover that you can use them as a platform or that you can latch onto them with the Grappling Beam and swing around. It does it in a way that, when you get it, makes you think you're smarter than the game when the reality is that it was always there for you to find out."

For Simon, it's the interactivity in the world that these items and abilities give you that he finds most impressive. "Something I always value in games is when your abilities have an actual effect on the world around you. If I were to pick something more specific, I'd point to the Speed Booster. On its surface, it's a pretty limited and clunky ability. But If you take what I said into account, the Speed Booster becomes a puzzle of trying to map out a runway that will either lead to a new area, or let you bulldoze through something that was previously a big challenge."

It's a good job that Samus' weapons and abilities allow her to be so resourceful because *Super Metroid*'s bosses are certainly not to be taken lightly. While some return from past games, many others are brand-new to the series, but all pose unique challenges, something which isn't lost on

THIS IS A TRIBUTE

DEVELOPERS SHARE HOW SUPER METROID INSPIRED THEIR GAMES



THOMAS HAPP ON

AXIOM VERGE 1 & 2

■ Most of it in some way is influenced by *Super Metroid*. The overall map structure is probably the biggest. If you look at the cadence of when you find a key item, encounter a boss, or enter a new area, it doesn't match exactly, but it's analogous. That's because I used *Super Metroid* as a benchmark when designing my development schedule and what content I wanted to finish for each milestone.

JACOBO LUENGO GOMEZ ON

METROID DREAD/METROID: SAMUS RETURNS

■ In *Metroid Dread* and *Metroid: Samus Returns* there are bosses that pay homage to some of the most emblematic antagonists of the saga such as Kraid and Proteus Ridley. And some of their mechanics and attack patterns are directly inspired by their *Super Metroid* versions. For me it is an honour to have been able to contribute to the exhilaration [fans] feel when discovering each one of them.

CASS KING ON

GUACAMELEE! 1 & 2

■ We definitely have some nods to *Super Metroid*, but we always tried to put our own twist on these. We really liked what *Metroid*'s Morph Ball ability could do for exploration, so instead of rolling Juan into a ball, we made him transform into a chicken. This led to more new gameplay that you don't see in *Super Metroid* like the ability to glide, dash, and attack while in the Morph Ball-inspired chicken form.

Simon. "I really love that there's a palpable sense of buildup, long before you reach a boss. Ridley is one of the first things you see in the game, and not long after, you discover his statue, along with several other monsters. This creates a sense of anticipation, waiting to see who they will be. You can even start to guess at their abilities, based on what the environment is like. For example, even before you reach the Spore Spawn, you've come across plant matter taking over the area, hinting at what is to come. For a time when the common design for a boss was to just throw one at you when you had reached the end of an area, making you aware of who you would face was a really nice touch."

» [SNES] Chozo Statues are littered throughout *Super Metroid* and give Samus access to weapons and new abilities.

Jacobo feels that **an feels that one of the most impactful aspects of *Super Metroid*'s mayors is that they're so much more than a sum of their parts.** "So much attention was paid to everything surrounding them, not just to the bosses themselves. The eerie, atmospheric trek to reach Phantoon. The surprise and subversion of a Chozo Statue springing to life and attacking you. The adventurous, climactic journey into Ridley's fiery lair for a rematch against a foe who already bested you. Mother Brain is the best example, with the fight containing an entire three-act structure inside it. They're dramatic experiences you don't quickly forget."

Jacobo feels that *Super Metroid*'s bosses do a great job of challenging the player to use their new weapons more effectively. "Every time you get a new ability, you have the feeling that what you were having trouble overcoming is no longer a problem. You feel like Samus is overpowered and your level of tension drops drastically. However, when you enter a boss arena something happens. An uneasy calm ensues, culminating in the appearance of the boss that is visually and technically impressive. It is at that moment that you realise what you are [facing] but you only need to take a breath and prepare for the pressure of the battle." Jacobo was also keen to point out the flexibility in how ▶

DEREK YU ON

ETERNAL DAUGHTER

■ Aside from the basic Metroidvania structure of exploration and backtracking, there are some power-ups and monsters that were also influenced by *Super Metroid* – good examples of this include Mia's armour upgrade and the plant boss that you encounter. Also, in the same way that *Alien*'s Ellen Ripley inspired Samus Aran, in retrospect I think that Samus was also a big inspiration for Mia.

SIMON ANDERSON ON

OWLBOY

■ In *Super Metroid*, meeting a new monster creates a moment of, "What is that?" and wishing to observe it in its habitat. But you don't get that feeling unless you feel part of its domain. Bushes should react as you brush by them. The wind will howl more as you approach a cave's entrance. While this kind of detail is much more commonplace these days, for a brand-new indie studio in 2008, this was pretty ambitious.

AURAL EXCELLENCE

HOW SUPER METROID'S SCORE ENHANCES ITS ATMOSPHERE

■ We've already examined how *Super Metroid*'s visuals and focus on exploration gives it a distinctive atmosphere, but that's only part of the story. "*Super Metroid*'s soundtrack does a wonderful job of enhancing the game's overall mood of mystery, adventure, and dread," Derek Yu tells us. "It's really well-integrated with the environments and parts of the soundtrack are clearly meant to evoke the sounds of the world itself (for example, the faint beeps and whirrs in Wrecked Ship's music)."

Drinkbox Studio's Cass King feels *Super Metroid*'s audio and sound design plays a major part in why the game is so iconic. "It really helps sell the atmosphere of being alone on a hostile alien planet, and makes Zebes feel like a living world. The visuals are great for the Super Nintendo, and I love the pixel art, but the soundtrack also does a lot of the heavy lifting establishing the atmosphere of each room you enter, and that atmosphere helps to make *Super Metroid* still hold up to this day."

Jack Mathews feels that the game's "music is iconic and extremely earwormy", while Shinesparkers' Darren Kerwin loves the game's soundtrack so much he has created a number of albums based on the game and the *Metroid* series in general. "It's a fine example of what the Super Nintendo could achieve with its sound chip," we're told. "Its compositions extend beyond the game it was written for, such as *Lower Norfair*, *Big Boss Confrontation* and the *Theme Of Super Metroid*, which have appeared in several other *Metroid* games since, and will likely continue to be used for decades to come. If I had the opportunity, I would love to share my sincere thanks to Kenji Yamamoto and Minako Hamano for the exceptional work they did with *Super Metroid*, and many other *Metroid* titles since, which have been hugely inspirational."

» If you head to shinesparkers.net you'll be able to read the team's thoughts on *Super Metroid* and other games in the series.

SHINESPARKERS

DARREN KERWIN AND ROY COLLINS DISCUSS THE POPULAR METROID DATABASE

HOW DID SHINESPARKERS COME ABOUT?

Darren: I started Shinesparkers in 2010. I wanted to create a website that would offer the latest *Metroid* news and exclusive content. One pillar of the website was to reach out to people closely connected to the franchise and conduct interviews with them so fans could learn more about the games they loved. I also conceived Community Spotlights to highlight the creative talents from other *Metroid* fans, such as cosplayers, musicians, artists, streamers and more.

WHAT'S YOUR PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENT?

Darren: Easily the fan-arrangement albums I produced and directed over a ten-year period between 2011 and 2021. I released six albums, three of which were dedicated to *Metroid* called *Harmony Of A Hunter* in 2011, 2013, and 2021, along with tributes to *Super Smash Bros* (*Harmony Of Heroes*) in 2014, and *Pokémon* (*Harmony Of A Champion*) in 2017. The *Harmony Of A Hunter* albums were far-reaching and enjoyed by *Metroid* fans across the world.

WHAT SETS SHINESPARKERS APART FROM SIMILAR *METROID* WEBSITES?

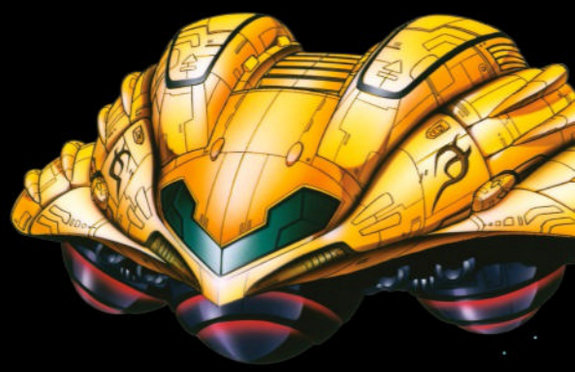
Roy: As Darren said, we view ourselves as the bridge between the fan community and the people who made the *Metroid* games. We host a podcast that has featured guests like Kit and Krysta, the former public relations managers at Nintendo and hosts of *Nintendo Minute*, and Jessica Erin Martin, the voice of Samus in *Other M*. As of March 2024, we have published 27 written interviews and podcasts with *Metroid* developers. Personally, the interviews are what I'm proudest of, and I always get butterflies when we land an interview and when we get the answers to our questions.

HOW HARD IS IT SECURING INTERVIEWS?

Roy: It certainly has its challenges. Interviews are the hardest for us to source for multiple reasons. First, some developers are worried about potentially breaking their NDAs. Even if they've long expired, some don't want to take the chance. I've heard of one developer who did an interview for another podcast being told afterwards not to give any more, despite not having worked at Nintendo for over a decade. Depending on their role and how long ago the project was, some developers may not remember or have much to say, and that can be a hindrance. Every interview we get is a miracle, and it's one to be proud of.

TELL US ABOUT THE PRESERVATION YOU DO?

Roy: Preservation is another core value for us. A couple of our features are translations of Japanese content that's either obscure or newly discovered. This includes mundane things like a blog post on the Japanese *Super Smash Bros Melee* site about the Samus Unmasked trophy, and more extensive content, like a Q&A on the Japanese *Metroid Prime 2* website that notably revealed the name of Phaaze well before we got the third game! Facts like these will eventually be lost to time if they are not documented, and our mission is to preserve as much of it as we can.



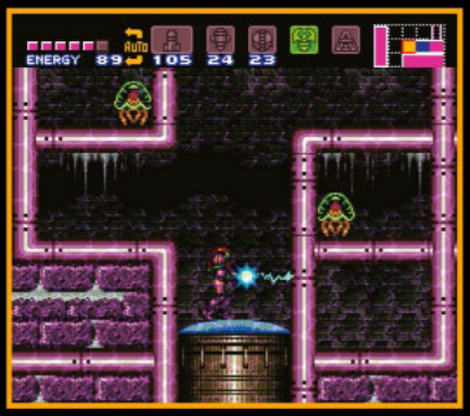
you can tackle certain bosses. "One of the things that stood out to me personally is that you can defeat bosses in more than one way. Apart from their visuals, it is something that as a player stays with you."

For Derek, Nintendo's decision to use them sparingly is a big part of their success. "For me, the boss battles are so good because they're relatively few and far between, so when you encounter a boss, it's always a big moment that leads to great satisfaction," he says. "Secondly, many of the bosses have these surprising cinematic moments that happen while you're still playing (in other words, they don't switch to a cutscene). The initial encounter with Ridley where he emerges from the shadows is a great example of this, as well as the final showdown with Mother Brain. It's rare to play a game that tells a story so seamlessly through its battles."

Even though *Super Metroid* is an immense experience and one of the best games of its type, it's not without its foibles. Playing through it again recently highlighted the difficulty of using Samus' Wall Jump and Space Jump and it sounds like we're not the only ones who have niggles with the game. "The thing that bothers me the most is the Space Jump," says Thomas, "it not only lets you fly almost anywhere but turns *Metroid*'s Screw Attack into a godlike superpower. I felt it just wiped away any sense of tension or horror." Jack feels that aspects of Samus' controls could have been tightened up, telling us, "The controls have

» [SNES] If you're having trouble defeating Draygon you can pull it into this electrical outlet for a near-instant death.

» [SNES] It can take a while to master but the Super Jump massively opens up the game.



» [SNES] These Mochtroids are the Space Pirates' attempt to clone Metroids, like Metroids they are susceptible to cold.

not aged well for weapon switching and diagonal shooting – these were greatly improved in subsequent games." Tim on the other hand feels that there are times in *Super Metroid* when, "Progress is extremely binary and linear, which can create frustration for players who hit a wall and can't find the answer to what to do next. Some of this was also the limitation of the era of consoles and tech, though."

It's worth noting that while mechanics like the Wall Jump and Super Jump can be difficult to use, they're a huge asset for speedrunners and those who want to sequence break the game by getting items long before they typically would be able to. "*Super Metroid* is extremely popular in the speedrunning community because there are tons of ways to complete it thanks to a lot of glitches and techniques that were creatively named by the community, such as the Chainsaw Beam, the X Factor, Arm Pumping or the Spacetime Beam," Glaedrax tells us. "You can even complete the game by doing the bosses in reverse order! The physics of the game in addition to the glitches allow for a lot of skill expression, sequence breaking and creativity for the player, making *Super Metroid* an inevitable pick for speedrun charity events and ensuring a good time for both the viewers and the runner. To this day, players are still finding clever ways to shave off extra time or even invent entirely new routes and fun challenges."

> "I HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME THINKING OF ASPECTS OF SUPER METROID THAT DID NOT INFLUENCE METROID PRIME"
> JACK MATHEWS

One baffling aspect of *Super Metroid* is that despite its success, few other games of the time would emulate it. Derek feels this could be down to timing. "At the time, I think *Super Metroid* felt like a singular experience rather than the beginning of a new genre," he offers. "It also came out near the transition from 2D to 3D in mainstream gaming, so there probably wasn't a lot of incentive to make something that would have been perceived as a *Super Metroid* clone." While it's currently available to modern gamers via Nintendo's Switch Online service it has never been remade, although Jack says its DNA can be found throughout *Metroid Prime*. "I have a difficult time thinking of aspects of *Super Metroid* that did not influence *Metroid Prime*. We were never going to be a remake [of *Super Metroid*], but we wanted it to feel similar."

It's highly likely that *Metroid Prime* is the closest we'll ever get to a 3D interpretation of the classic game, but Jacobo was quick to point out that the influence of both *Super Metroid* and *Metroid* can still be seen in numerous modern games. "*Metroid Prime* is certainly one of those examples in which you realise that if the mainstays that shape a genre are strong, they will work regardless of the time and technology. Furthermore, over time there are other genres that have been incorporating *Metroid* elements into their games, coexisting with them to make them evolve. Clear examples of this are games like the *Batman Arkham* saga, the new *Tomb Raider* saga, the *Star Wars: Jedi* saga, the *Darksiders* saga or many Soulslike games. Not to mention great examples in the indie scene."

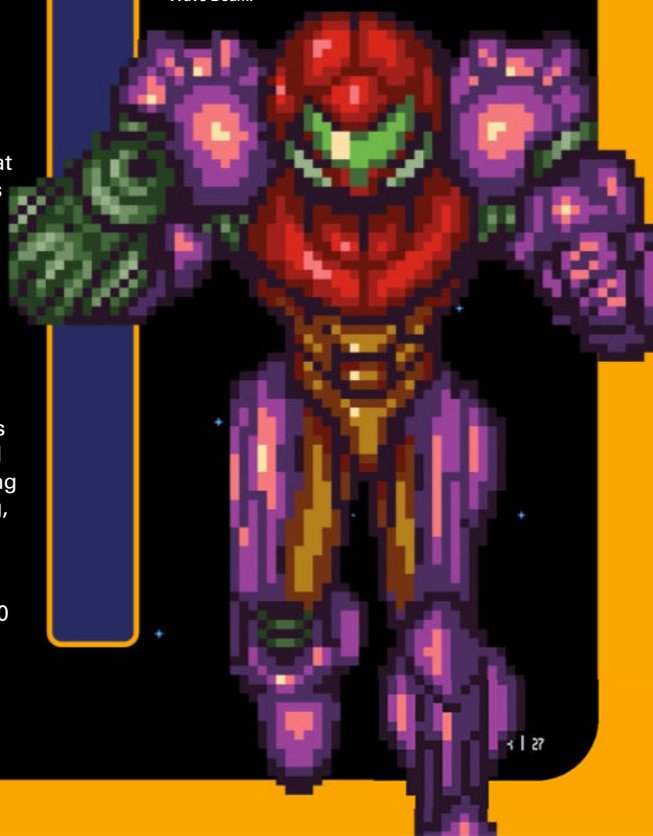
It might be three decades old now, but it's easy to see why *Super Metroid* remains such an enduring masterpiece and is loved by so many gamers. "It was groundbreaking at the time and still holds up as compelling, fun and unique," offers Jack. "Even with all that has come after it and iterated on its systems, I can still sit down and play through all of *Super Metroid* and enjoy it 30 years later. That says a lot." ✱

SHEER VERSATILITY

THE POWER OF SAMUS' ARM CANNON

One thing about *Super Metroid* that you may not realise is just how customisable Samus' arm cannon is. "I really love the way you can customise the weaponry by combining the different types of beams," enthuses Jacobo Luengo Gomez. "I think it's a very interesting feature that offers a lot of possibilities in terms of adding light strategic touches to the game." Jacobo is referring to how beams can be switched on and off, allowing them to combine in a number of different ways. "Each new *Metroid* instalment has strived to add new weapons to Samus' arsenal while improving existing ones, but this feature is something that has remained in *Super Metroid* and makes the game truly unique."

» [SNES] You can turn off Samus' beams at will or combine them in different ways. This is the base Wave Beam.



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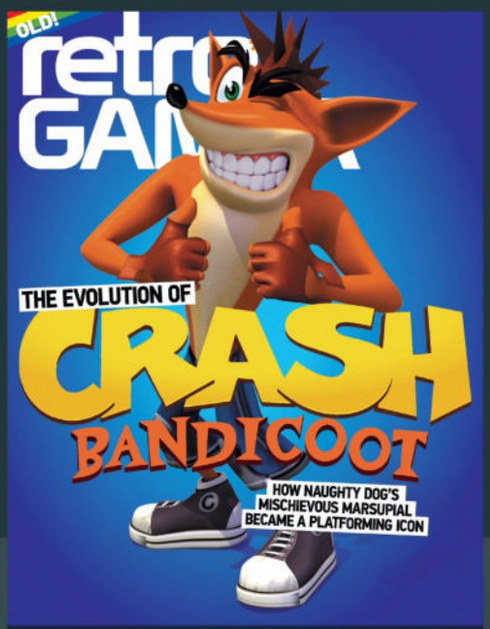

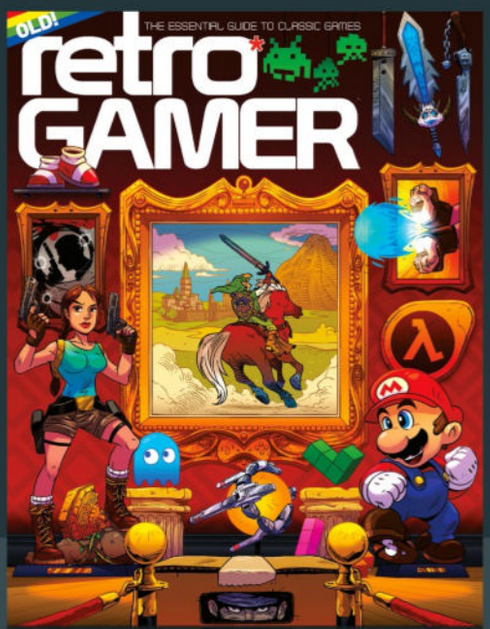

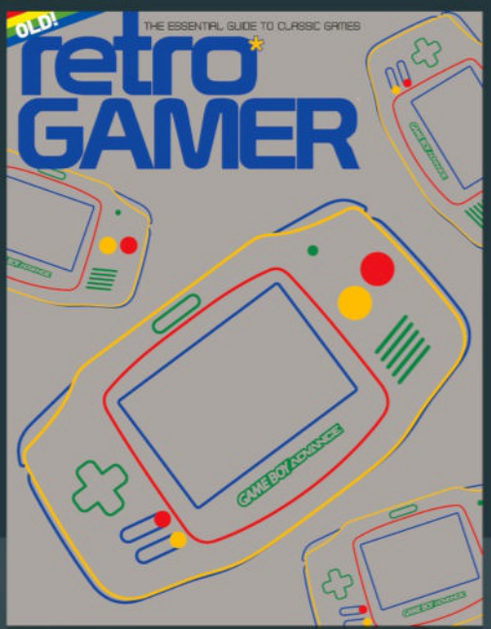

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IT HAS BEEN MAKING BEIGE THE NEW BLACK SINCE 1982, SO JOIN US FOR A CELEBRATION OF THE MIGHTY C64 AS WE REVISIT ITS HIGHS AND OCCASIONAL LOWS OVER THE LAST FOUR DECADES
WORDS BY PAUL DRURY AND ANDREW FISHER

BACK ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

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A RARE CELEBRATION

ISSUE 250

■ Want the definitive article on Rare? This is where you'll find it. A Rare Celebration breaks down every era of the studio, from its early days as Ultimate Play The Game to its exciting N64 years. It concludes with a look at Rare's last two decades at Microsoft and classics like *Rare Replay* and *Sea Of Thieves*. Don't miss it.

40 YEARS OF THE ZX SPECTRUM

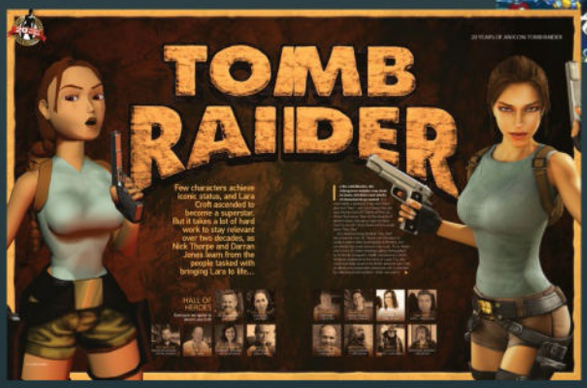
ISSUE 232

■ This in-depth article features a number of prominent game developers and breaks down the lifespan of the humble Speccy on a year-by-year basis, from its early innovative games to its exciting homebrew era which is still going strong today. If you're a Commodore 64 fan you'll find a similar feature on that system in **RG** 238.

A TRIBUTE TO TREASURE

ISSUE 219

■ One of our most popular features has been our A Tribute To series, which highlights a developer's back catalogue and includes input from the creators. It all kicked off in issue 219 with Masato Maegawa guiding us through Treasure's 32-year history. Other notable articles in the series include Ocean Software (**RG** 244) and Falcom (**RG** 224).



20 YEARS OF TOMB RAIDER

ISSUE 163

■ We wanted to do something truly special for Lara Croft's 20th anniversary so we spoke to a huge number of *Tomb Raider* veterans to give an incredibly comprehensive overview of the popular series. If you're a fan of the *Tomb Raider* series you'll find this article is filled with fascinating insight about the blockbuster franchise.

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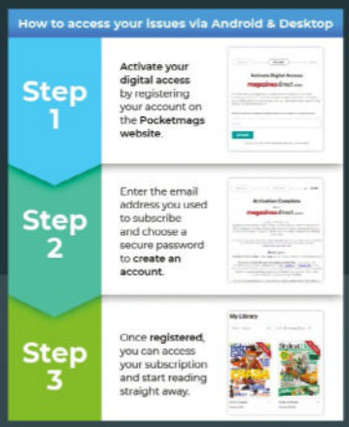
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ULTIMATE GUIDE

California Games

HAVING COVERED THE SUMMER AND WINTER OLYMPICS, AND TAKEN A TOUR AROUND THE WORLD OF SPORT, EPYX STOPPED OFF IN THE GOLDEN STATE FOR THE NEXT ENTRY IN ITS WILDLY POPULAR GAMES SERIES. JOIN US AS WE BASK IN THE SUNSHINE OF CALIFORNIA GAMES

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

Could *California Games* be any more Eighties? With its sunny vibes, wild fashions and goofy excesses, it's hard to imagine how it could be – until you discover that it was almost titled *Rad Sports*!

According to project lead Matt Householder, this was the working title during initial development. Elaborating on the story (see **RG** 149), the idea for the game occurred when he and his wife were out walking near their home in San Francisco and some kid tore past them on a skateboard. As they continued walking, he added other alternative sports to the mix – including surfing, roller-skating and BMX racing – and the basic concept for the game was born there and then. We guess that shows the benefits of a stroll in the sunshine.

Although the name would soon change to *California Games*, giving it a sense of place and tying it to the earlier games in Epyx's long-running series, the working title actually served a dual purpose. Yes, *Rad Sports* shoved the Eighties West Coast vernacular front and centre, but it also highlighted what the game offered – a radical departure from what came before.

> "THE SELECTION OF SPORTS WAS WELL BALANCED, CATERING FOR BOTH THRILL AND CHILL SEEKERS"

Epyx's *Summer Games*, *Summer Games II* and *Winter Games* pretty much exhausted the Olympic sports format, which is why the fourth game in the series – *World Games* – broadened its scope to include more eclectic events. However, some of the events were still Olympic sports and the formalities of international competition were retained. *California Games* dispensed with all that, presenting the player with youth-orientated pastimes instead. Whereas in the previous games you chose a country, here you selected a sponsor (most of which were real brands like Santa Cruz Skateboards and Ocean Pacific Apparel). The predecessors played national anthems – in *California Games* the only anthem you heard was the rock 'n' roll standard *Louie, Louie* by Californian Richard Berry (in an early example of music officially licensed for a videogame).

The selection of sports was well balanced, catering for both thrill seekers (BMX, half-pipe and roller-skating) and chill seekers (foot bag and flying disk). The main event however was surfing. Whether it was the most fun to play is debatable, but the breaking wave effect looked so damn impressive that screens of it were front and centre in every magazine advert, ▶

» [Apple IIGS] Skating the half-pipe is *hard*. Get your timing slightly wrong and you're going down.

» [C64] You can bag some bonus points by thwacking that gull with your foot bag.

» [C64] The BMX minigame is better than many of the standalone bike games that were out around the time.

Conversion Capers

WHICH OF THE VARIOUS VERSIONS WERE MEDAL WINNERS?

■ The lead version, which the other versions tried to match and, on more advanced hardware, surpass. Their work was cut out, as this is a dazzling release where the presentation and the playability are both best-in-class. For many this remains the definitive version.

■ Not the prettiest version, thanks to the hardware's idiosyncratic display, but it does manage to display 16 on-screen colours. The downside of this achievement is that it's slower and less responsive than the C64 game. The music is miles off SID standards too.

■ Like the Apple II version, this falls far behind the C64 original. Going head-to-head with the Apple II game, the visuals are comparable (running in VGA mode), but the framerate is smoother and slightly increased. Sonically it sounds worse (if that's possible).

■ Developed in the US by Westwood Associates, this stands out as the most polished home-computer version. The surfing screenshot may look underwhelming, but in motion it's, erm, going OFF. The whole game has been put together with clear care and attention.

■ Not related to the Amiga release, this UK-developed conversion isn't as refined in terms of sound and graphics (the animation in particular could be better), but all of the events play as well as you'd hope. The Amiga version wins, but not by very much.

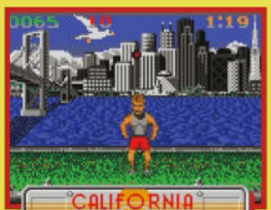
■ In the battle of the 16-bit computer ports this finishes a distinct third. Visually it's based on the classy Amiga version, but performance-wise it's lacking with some truly choppy scrolling on the BMX, roller-skating and flying disk events. The music is decent, mind.

■ Choice Software did a decent job with the ST version, but its 8-bit conversions are [insert surfer slang here for 'very poor']. Everything is off – the graphics, the sound, the controls. The roller-skating event (pictured) is probably the best of a bad bunch.

■ This makes the weak CPC version look like a gold medal winner. An absence of colour and an overuse of dithered graphics results in an awful-looking game – with playability to match. Hardly worth the 36% *Crash* magazine gave it. What a waste of magnetic media.

■ If you thought the Spectrum version was as low as things could go, say hello to the MSX port. Someone (wisely uncredited) has taken the Speccy code and spent their coffee break making it work on the MSX, with zero optimisations, for a zero-rated result. Bravo.

■ Another game on the "they converted *that* to the 2600?" list. Well they did, and it's a very credible and playable version. It's also recognisable – although roller-skating and flying disk are missing, and BMXing has been reworked (and is fun in its own right).



■ Like the 2600 version, this has been adapted to fit the hardware. Roller-skating and flying disk are out, and the skatebording now scrolls on account of the small screen. Best of the bunch is surfing and it's almost worth owning for this event alone. Almost.

■ Developed by Rare, this is a faithful if no-frills adaptation that delivers solid versions of all six events. As you'd expect from a Rare title, the graphics are very good, but the gameplay feels a little ragged in places, as if the fine-tuning was skipped to meet a deadline.

■ We're big fans of this conversion here at **RG**. All six events have been converted with clear respect for the originals, and the end result is one of the system's finest sports titles. It even included a few surprises for veterans of the existing computer versions.

■ Forget the sequel, *this* is how you update the original. The sports are all pleasingly familiar, but the presentation has been polished until it shines and there are various settings you can tweak. The only downside – flying disk is missing. What a shame!

Developer Q&A

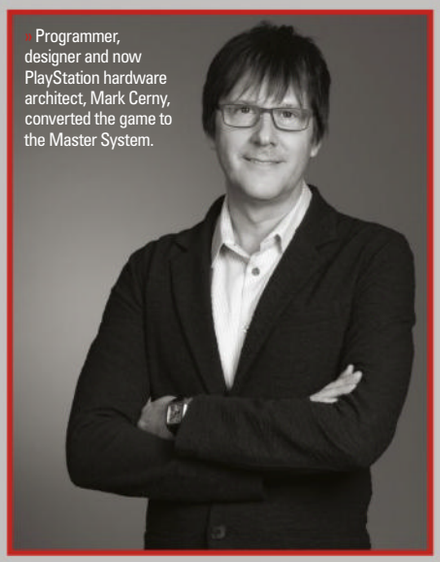
MARK CERNY REVEALS THE STORY BEHIND THE SUPERB MASTER SYSTEM VERSION

HOW DID YOU COME TO WORK ON THE MASTER SYSTEM VERSION OF *CALIFORNIA GAMES*?

■ At that time, Sega was searching for games to port to the Master System. I was working on a port of Shanghai – a game I'd asked them to licence as I love puzzle games – when they told me they'd gotten the rights to *California Games*, and asked if I would like to port that game next. It looked like a nice challenge so I said yes.

HAD YOU PLAYED THE GAME BEFORE WORKING ON IT?

■ I'd certainly heard of it, but didn't play until after Sega had picked up the licence. The prospect of porting six separate minigames was a bit daunting, but they all looked relatively simple. My guess was three months to do the job… which of course was wildly wrong. It ended up taking closer to six months.



Programmer, designer and now PlayStation hardware architect, Mark Cerny, converted the game to the Master System.

WHAT KIND OF REFERENCE MATERIALS DID YOU RECEIVE, IF ANY?

■ Our reference was the game itself, I believe on the Commodore 64. That meant that our little three-person team – planner, artist and myself as programmer – was essentially eyeballing the existing game in order to recreate it. At the time I couldn't speak Japanese and the planner spoke no English. He'd huddle with the artist and they'd create pieces of artwork such as limbs of a character or parts of a playfield. The planner would print them, cut them out, and use a glue stick to stick them in a big book. This would be followed by lots of pointing and pantomime. By the end of the project, we were in quite a groove despite our inability to use words to communicate.

WERE THERE ANY DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING THE EVENTS ON THE MASTER SYSTEM?

■ The toughest event was definitely surfing due to the complexities of creating that wave, but the artist had a plan and it worked out quite nicely. The most fun to implement was BMX. I was able to implement fake multiplane scrolling. The Master System didn't support that in hardware but there were ways to get around that if your software approach was clever enough.

"THE TOUGHEST EVENT WAS DEFINITELY SURFING DUE TO THE COMPLEXITIES OF CREATING THAT WAVE..."

DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR FAVOURITE EVENT AMONG THE SIX INCLUDED?

■ Definitely the roller-skating. I recall stumbling a bit as a player until I got into a groove, and in the end it was very satisfying to play.

YOUR VERSION RECEIVED POSITIVE PRESS REVIEWS, AND IS GENERALLY THOUGHT OF AS BEING ONE OF THE BETTER VERSIONS OF THE GAME. WHY DO YOU THINK IT IS SO WELL REGARDED?

■ By that point in development for the system, we had a *lot* to draw on. In my case, that was a bag of tricks from my previous three Master System titles, plus the ability to learn techniques from the other programmers in the bullpen. In true Japanese style, all of our desks were lined up in one area facing the boss. So if you needed help or wanted to brainstorm, there was someone literally three feet away.

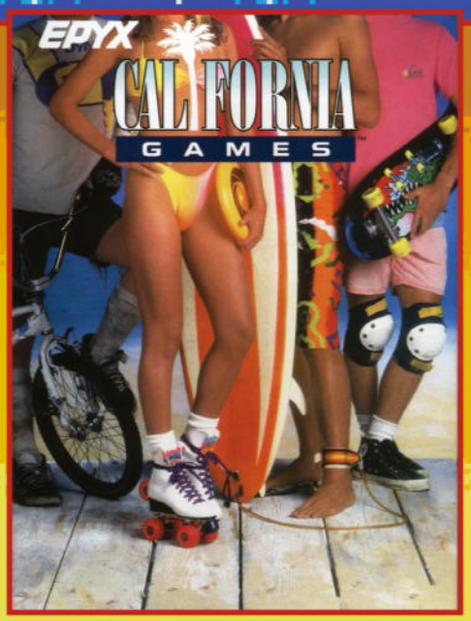
» [C64] Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water…

preview and review. Epyx was renowned for its high levels of presentation and polish, and with *California Games* it really topped out. The simply depicted athletes from the earlier games were replaced by proper characters, giving them more personality. The California locales also added to the appeal – like playing foot bag in front of San Francisco Bay, with the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz Island in the background. Similarly, flying disk took place in the Yosemite Valley, while the skateboarding half-pipe was located in Los Angeles, under the Hollywood sign.

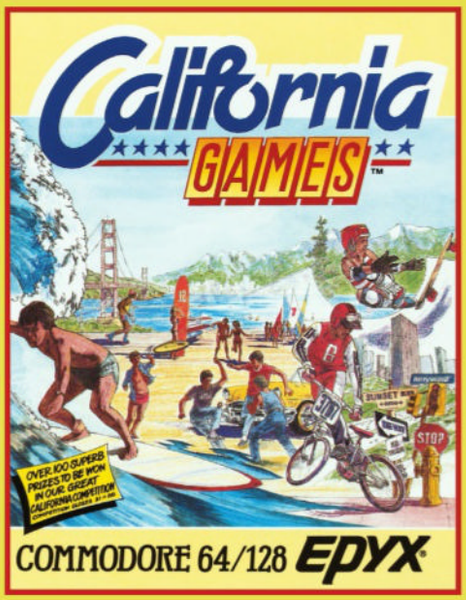
That famous landmark featured in one of several 'hidden' scenes that build on the humour that emerged in *World Games*. After finishing the half-pipe, sometimes a small earthquake would shake the screen and cause one of the letters in the sign to topple over. In surfing, wiping out occasionally led to a cameo appearance from a mocking seabird, dancing dolphin or menacing shark (complete with the 'da-dum, da-dum' *Jaws* theme). Finally, in flying disk, if you paused for too long before throwing, an alien ship would swoop down and abduct the catcher, in a nod to Williams' *Defender*.

"EPYX WAS RENOWNED FOR ITS HIGH LEVELS OF PRESENTATION AND WITH CALIFORNIA GAMES IT REALLY TOPPED OUT"

All of this content was produced by a 20-strong team of programmers, artists and musicians that developed the game over a nine-month period. The lead format was the Commodore 64, but the team also worked on the Apple II and PC versions at the same time. The game was released in 1987, during the height of summer, fittingly, and immediately garnered great reviews. *Zzap!64* gave it 97% and a Gold Medal, with editor Ciaran Brennan calling it the best of the series to date. "*California Games* is a real progression in the Epyx sports sim range," he commented. "Epyx have somehow managed to surpass their own high standards – the pictures and sounds generated by this program are atmospheric beyond belief." Fellow reviewer Jaz Rignall also gave it the thumbs up. "*California Games* is quite simply the apex of computer sports gaming at the present



» The original US artwork, showing the competitors getting ready to 'shred', we believe the term is.



» Here's the alternative artwork used on the versions of the game published by US Gold.

» [Atari ST] The judges award their scores in the surfing event. We need to try harder. [Much harder – Ed]

» [Atari Lynx] The wave might be rolling the wrong way, but the surfing game on the Lynx is excellent.

time." Eric Doyle of *Your Commodore* also deemed it Epyx's best. "If I had to lose all but one of my Epyx *Games* disks, I would choose to keep this one," he wrote in a glowing review, where he actually awarded the graphics 11/10. And on the C64 at the time, the graphics really did go one better – up to 11.

"WORLDWIDE SALES REPORTEDLY TOPPED 1.5 MILLION COPIES, MAKING IT THE BEST SELLING GAME IN THE SERIES"

***The Games Machine* was a little cooler, awarding the C64 version 92%, commenting, "Though undoubtedly the most polished of the *Games* series, *California Games* isn't quite as absorbing as its predecessor *World Games*."** One issue all of the mags agreed on was the cassette version. The game was obviously a multi-load, designed for systems with disk drives, yet European publisher US Gold had to convert it to cassette for the UK and other markets. This result was generally fine (albeit long-winded) if you played through the events in order, but not so good if you wanted to practice certain sports. "The multi-load cassette may cause a few headaches," warned *Zzap!64*, but it was felt that the overall game was so good that it was an inconvenience worth suffering.

Any worries that players might be experiencing *Games* tedium after four previous entries were dispelled when *California Games* shifted 500,000 copies by the end of 1988. Conversions naturally followed and the game appeared on a further 11 formats – with each team no doubt wondering how they were supposed to recreate THE WAVE. The most interesting conversions were those for the Sega consoles. The Master System version, programmed by Mark Cerny (see Developer Q&A panel) and released in 1989, replicated the original in fine fashion and even added a tile-flipping minigame where you could unlock new skills and equipment. Meanwhile, the 1991 Mega Drive version, developed by Novotrade, took things further by giving the graphics and animation a proper 16-bit boost and adding new elements to the familiar events (half-pipe and foot bag now allowed two people to play at once, and in roller-skating you shared the boardwalk with other skaters).

Thanks to the numerous conversions, total worldwide sales reportedly topped 1.5 million copies, making it the best-selling game in the series by some margin. Epyx continued to pump out sims – *The Games: Winter Edition* and *The Games: Summer Edition* followed, along with the lacklustre *California Games II* – but the firm struggled to recapture its past glories. Epyx ceased operations in 1993, but in 2006 it was announced that UK publisher System 3 had acquired Epyx's assets and a new version of *California Games* was heading to the Sony PSP, Nintendo DS and Wii. Nothing materialised, but the C64 version did pop up on the Wii Virtual Console in 2008. More recently the C64 game was bundled with The C64 device, and both the C64 and Atari Lynx versions have appeared on Evercade carts, proving that the sun hasn't yet set on *California Games* and its rad sports. ✱

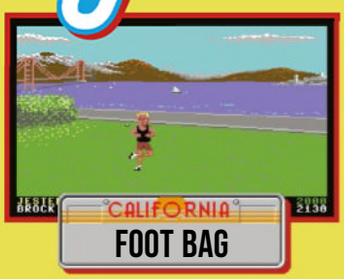
Rad Sports

THE SIX EVENTS THAT MAKE UP CALIFORNIA GAMES

HALF-PIPE

In the shadow of the Hollywood sign, you have 75 seconds to perform as many tricks and turns as possible. Timing is everything here – turn too soon or too late, or hold too long, and you're losing some skin. This requires more practice than any other event.

OUR RATING: ..... GNARLY



FOOT BAG

With such picturesque surroundings, it's fitting that this is the most relaxed event of the six. Kick the bag into the air and try to keep it off the ground, while freestyling some tricks for bonus points. Don't forget to hit that pesky gull while you're hopping about.

Our rating: ..... BOGUS

SURFING

Let's be honest, this is why we're all here, to ride those epic waves while trying to look cool and impress the judges (it's possible to be awarded a perfect 10.0 score if you take risks, like riding under the curl of the wave). Watch out for sharks when you wipe out.

OUR RATING: ..... TUBULAR

ROLLER-SKATING

Bomb along the boardwalk, avoiding dropped ice creams, discarded bikinis!, errant beach balls and other obstacles. Utilising a clever control method where you push up and down rhythmically to build up speed, this is another event that demands practice.

OUR RATING: ..... BURLEY

» [C64] In flying disk, the most points are awarded by catching the Frisbee when it's directly over your head.

» [Mega Drive] The neat two-player feature allows one competitor to practice while the other earns a score.

This event is not so much about performing tricks (although you can pull off a few jumps and flips), but rather reaching the end of the bumpy dirt course as quickly as possible. Along the way you need to tap right to maintain speed while dodging hazards.

OUR RATING: ..... BUFF

It's basically unbranded Frisbee. By selecting the perfect angle and speed by hitting the green sweet spots, you'll hurl the disk across the valley – at which point, you take control of the catcher who must pluck it out of the air. It's more fun than it sounds.

OUR RATING: ..... PSYCHE

More Fun In The Sun

Stellar sales of the original game resulted in *California Games II* which debuted on the PC in 1990, with conversions to the Amiga, Atari ST, Super Nintendo and Master System following in 1992/93. Second time around there were five sports represented – skateboarding, snowboarding, bodyboarding, hang-gliding and jet skiing (this last one was skipped on the Master System). Although there were fewer sports than before, there was actually more content as most of the events had multiple sections. For example, snowboarding was made up of four parts: first, fly your helicopter to the top of the mountain, then snowboard down the mountainside until you reach the half-pipe section, where you can pull off some tricks, and finally continue down to the finish line at the foot of the mountain.

Despite these additions and the expected improvements to the presentation, the sequel received average-to-low review scores across all formats. The reaction suggested that the multi-sports format had run its course, yet it surely didn't help that Epyx was fighting bankruptcy throughout its development, with the original game's creator Matt Householder roped in to salvage something from the various work-in-progress builds that could be released.

» [PC] Yes, it does snow in California, which opened the door to the snowboarding event.

» [PC] Hang in there. Taking to the skies, armed with water balloons, in the 1990 sequel.

Safari Hunt

IT'S COMING RIGHT AT US!

» MASTER SYSTEM » 1986 » SEGA

The Master System will always hold a special place in my heart as it's the first console I bought with my own money. I was working full time at Gateway and paying off small instalments for the console pack that included the Light Phaser. Along with a copy of *Shinobi*, the built-in games were all I owned for a few months so I played each of them religiously and got pretty good at them. In addition to *Snail Maze*, I also had access to *Hang-On* and *Safari Hunt*, which was designed to make use of my new lightgun.

Safari Hunt is an incredibly simplistic game, even by the standards of the time. Think of Nintendo's *Duck Hunt* but with a greater range of animals to shoot, multiple levels, none of the charm of Nintendo's blaster and some very outdated depictions of African hunters. It's best to describe *Safari Hunt*'s gameplay as competent – it certainly doesn't do anything terribly, but it doesn't push the genre in any particular way either.

My sister Hayley once asked me why I liked killing animals in the game when I loved them in real life and I didn't really have an answer for her. I just liked shooting them because it was funny to see them run away with bandages on their bodies to show they'd been hit. Even today I enjoy the various *Cabela's* games, even though the only wildlife shooting I do in real life is with my camera.

I guess sometimes a game doesn't have to be incredible to keep your attention – it just has to be there and offer you something you can't get anywhere else. I certainly didn't have any money at the time for *Operation Wolf*, so continually looping *Safari Hunt*'s three levels while amassing the highest score possible seemed like the perfect way to justify my costly purchase.

Sega's game never received a standalone release and it's easy to see why, there's just not enough game there to justify it. As a pack-in title it's perfect though, it's just a shame I never got to shoot the crocodile that shows up on the game's title screen.

THE MAKING OF CAPTAIN BLOOD

AS HE TRAVELS THE HYDRA GALAXY IN HIS SHIP THE ARK, CAPTAIN BLOOD MUST TRACK DOWN AND DISINTEGRATE HIS FIVE REMAINING CLONES. TO DO SO, HE'LL HAVE TO COMMUNICATE WITH SEVERAL ALIEN SPECIES USING THE UPCOM, A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE DEVICE. UNIVERSALITY IS THE KEY CONCEPT BEHIND THIS WIDELY ACCLAIMED FRENCH CLASSIC

WORDS BY GUY MIQUEL ALBERT

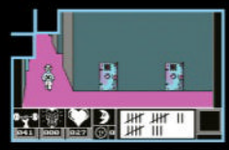
IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** INFOGRAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** EXXOS / ERE INFORMATIQUE
- **PLATFORM:** ATARI ST, VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

Phil Ulrich has always been fascinated by human history and metaphysical questions. As *Captain Blood*'s creator and scenarist, his personal life of adventures influenced the videogame greatly. "Before the age of 20 I already had travelled once around the world," he tells us, "going through many interesting episodes in Polynesia, for instance. It opened my mind on many subjects and metaphysical questions have haunted me since. Where are we from? Where are we going? Who are we? As a teenager I created what I called then a 'cosmic vision'. Every time I would have to solve a problem, I would put myself into the skin of someone living outside planet Earth. In these conditions, you analyse situations differently and put them into perspective."

Phil was also interested in Einstein theories, he admittedly thought gravity would make Earth a prison, since wherever you tried to go you were eventually attracted back to the ground. At this point, he launched small rockets propelled by sodium chlorate into the sky, surprising his village inhabitants. After cofounding ERE Informatique, the first French videogame publishing company in 1983, Phil later met Didier Bouchon, who was already an accomplished programmer. "When the Atari ST was launched, I ordered two machines and dedicated one of them to Didier, strongly believing in his potential," continues Phil. "He had a strong artistic sense, and was very curious about science fiction and sciences in general. He was programming routines on his Atari ST when I visited him almost every night. His fondness for fractals led him to generate some kind of map out of a number – a digital seed – a surface that looked like a geographical map, with seas, mountains, on a sphere. It was a planet! A planet that weighed the weight of this digital seed, this number." Didier then explained that a floppy disk could easily contain thousands of these planets. At this point, Phil realised that they had everything in hand to create a videogame set in space.

Phil and Didier were also fascinated by the concept of AI, aiming to somehow incorporate it into their game. "What made me interested in computers was the man-machine dialogue, to be in touch with a form of intelligence," says Phil. "I always felt that videogame authors were inside their games, facing the players, like role-playing game masters. This is where the real talent is." Despite having a strong concept, the road to eventually develop the *Captain Blood* project proved to be a long fight. "We had a galaxy map from which every pixel could be a different planet," says Phil. "Each planet's identity was its coordinates. I wanted to populate these planets, which was a very exciting idea – I could imagine original species with different characteristics, and past interactions between them, a real history."



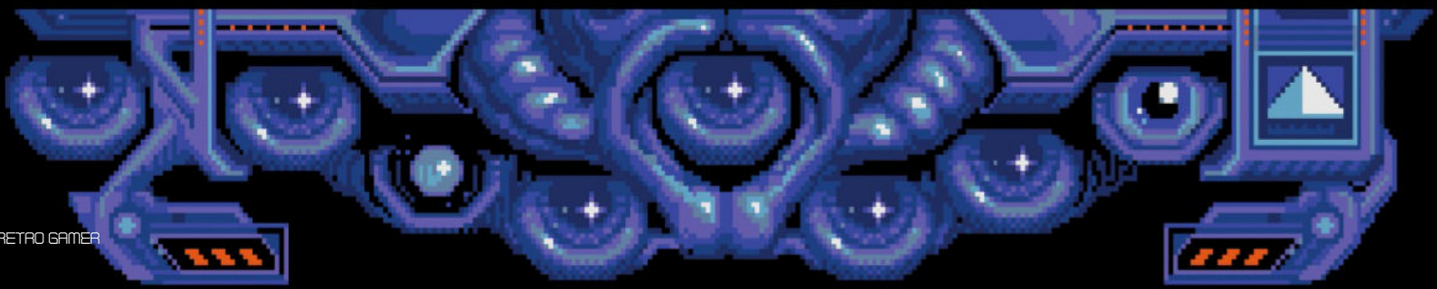
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MACADAM BUMPER
PLATFORM: DOS, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1985

DOOMSDAY BLUES (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: ATARI ST, PC, AMSTRAD CPC
RELEASED: 1986

PURPLE SATURN DAY (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: DOS, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1989

> "I WANTED TO CREATE A VIDEOGAME THAT WAS AS UNIVERSAL AS PONG"
> **PHIL ULRICH**

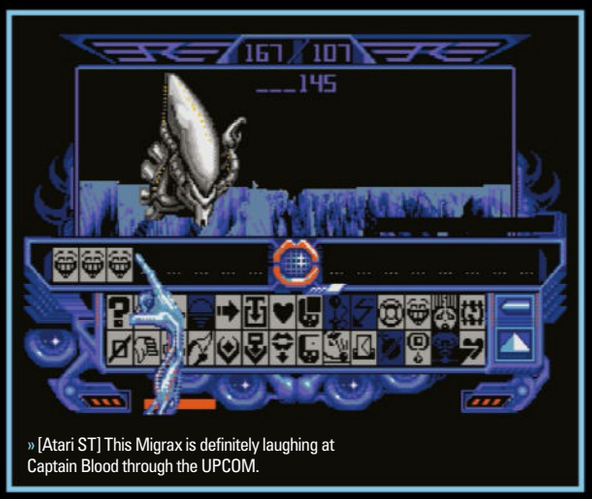


» Phil Ulrich co-created *Captain Blood* and imagined its detailed background and scenario. He still composes electronic music with the band Absynthus.

» François Lionet adapted *Captain Blood* to the Commodore 64 and PCs. He now works as a network administrator for a secondary school in Vendée.

» [Atari ST] You'll need to fly to the end of dangerous canyons to find aliens.

» [Atari ST] The planet's defence system is approaching. It's time to fly lower



» [Atari ST] This Migrax is definitely laughing at Captain Blood through the UPCOM.

» [Atari ST] Fractal mountain surfaces are filled when Captain Blood encounters an alien.

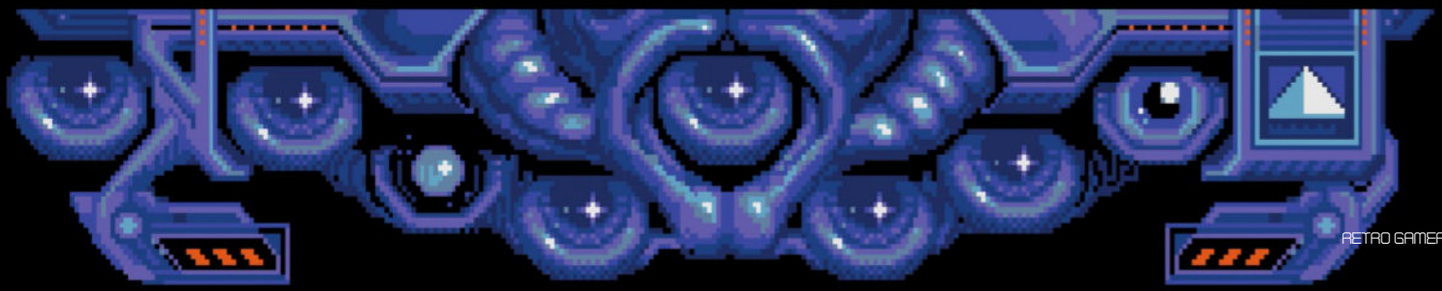
It was universality that was the driving force behind *Captain Blood*. "I wanted to create a universal adventure game," continues Phil. "At the time, if you wanted to translate an adventure game into German, for example, a succession of bugs occurred frequently, bugs that we could not solve. Besides, the translation work was overwhelming, as translations into English, Japanese, and many other languages were required. I wanted to create a videogame that was as universal as *Pong*: once the controller is in hand, you immediately know how to play." That's where the idea of creating a universal language for *Captain Blood* surfaced. "If we simplify the language generally used in classic adventure games, creating something such as a card game where each card would represent a word and a topic, we could easily say things like 'me want eat', or 'you nice' for example. With very few words you could build a conversation," Phil explains.

Soon enough an icon-based language system was implemented into the game, but there were still problems to solve. "Having created the icons wasn't sufficient," says Phil, "as we still had to imagine how all this could work as a language. This is where we entered the heart of this system, the UPCOM, the Universal Protocol Of ▶

KEY CONVERSIONS

WHICH PORTS OF CAPTAIN BLOOD ARE WORTH PLAYING?

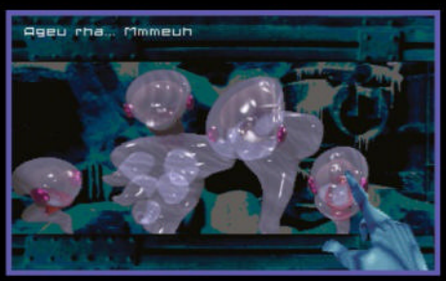
Phil Ulrich and Didier Bouchon's game has been adapted to more than eight other types of hardware besides the Atari ST. The good news is, all these versions are really enjoyable. Despite François Lionet's self-criticism about his development of the C64 and PC CGA versions, for instance, these two are clearly fun to play. Considering the hardware limitations, they do not look as shiny as their Atari ST, Amiga 500 or Apple IIGS (below left) counterparts, but the UPCOM system runs well and interacting with the aliens, the essential fun in *Captain Blood*, remains very entertaining. The same can be said about the ZX Spectrum (128K) and Thomson MO6/TO7 versions, which look graphically fair. The excellent Amstrad CPC version (below right) is highly recommended, adapting the original in a gorgeous way, even though keeping up with the Atari ST version seemed quite impossible. On the other hand, it is harder to tolerate the Apple IIGS' flying sequences across the planets, as they offer low-quality fractal models and slower action, meaning less immersion while playing. The Amiga version is an excellent alternative to the Atari ST one, it's quite similar, but amputates the UPCOM icons' specific sounds, making the player unable to recognise the vocabulary only by listening to a conversation.



BLOOD'S LEGACY

CAPTAIN BLOOD BEFORE AND AFTER THE BIG BANG

The Exxos label became Cryo Interactive in 1990. During the following creative years a sequel to *Captain Blood* emerged (below left). This time, Commander Blood has to travel in the Ark through space and time, using Black holes to help him reach the source of everything – the big bang. Although sharing many similarities with the 1988 game, such as a background filled with planets and aliens to converse with in order to discover new locations, *Commander Blood* abandons the icon-based UPCOM system for a more classic dialogue interface, with single words to click on to express a theme or an idea. Many sequences in full-motion video liven up the game. The latter also banks on a surreal, ubiquitous sense of humour. The third part of the trilogy, *The Big Bug Bang* (below right) only released in France in 1996 and is set right after the big bang. The player needs to create life and repopulate the universe, dropping a basic life form on a planet and helping it develop and migrate to another one, and so on. Apart from this new feature, one feels right at home, since the Ark interface and many alien species are exactly the same as *Commander Blood*'s.



» [PC] The less immersive but still very enjoyable PC CGA version offers four colours only.

» [Atari ST] This is just one of the 32,768 colourful planets generated in *Captain Blood*.

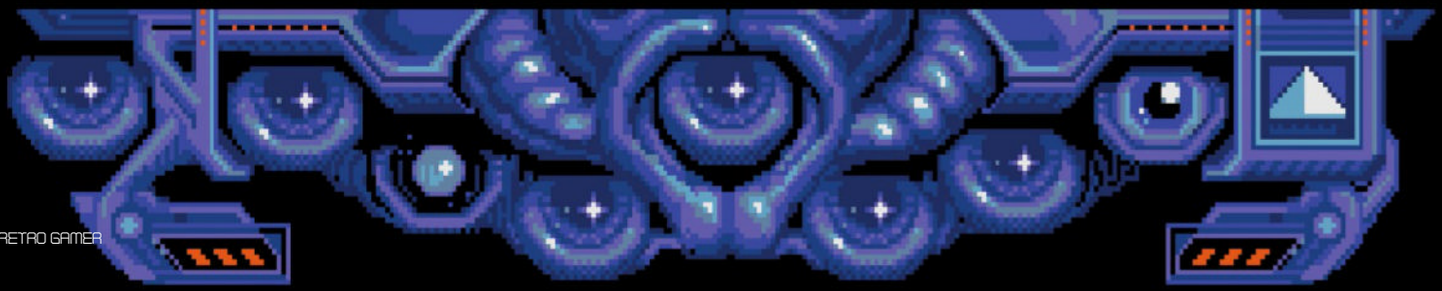
» [Atari ST] Is the Kingpak alien race connected to Pac-Man? Their planet seems to suggest so.

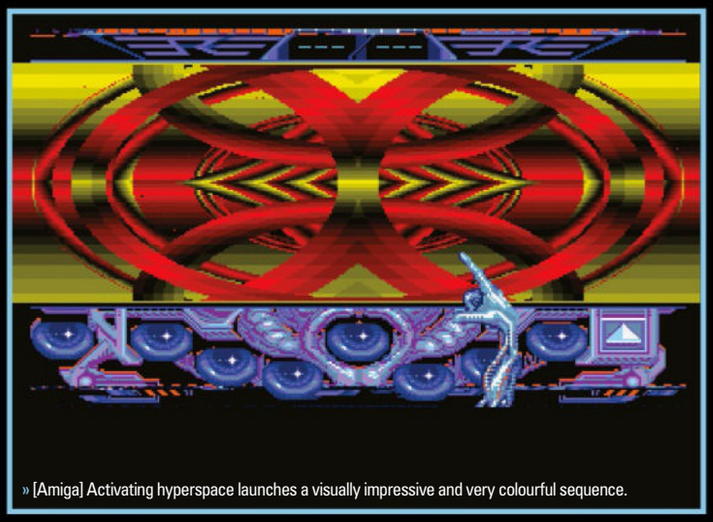
» [Atari ST] The Buggol is the last alien of his kind and is obsessed with the idea of democracy.

» [Atari ST] Piloting the Oorxx probe over the surfaces of planets requires skill with the mouse.

▶ Communication. I created a collective unconscious for all the species of the Hydra galaxy. All the characters have the same database: eat, drink, sleep, reproduce and so on. Then a database was created for a specific species living on a particular planet, defining this species' characteristics. For example, the Izwals are nice, not very clever but likeable, cute as pets could be. Since they are nice, respectful and democratic, they appear to be weak, and are targeted by other more belligerent aliens. Thanks to the established database, we created sentences corresponding to anything an Izwal could think of. I realised I could make up about a hundred sentences for each of the 16 species. These species imitate human behaviours, as we're accustomed with on planet Earth. Then Didier started to implement a system where every time you entered an icon on the UPCOM, the character's database would be integrally scanned in order to find the corresponding answers. With a set of rules to make the dialogue more complex, such as behaviours or patterns, talking to the aliens became very entertaining."

While these complex databases defined what the non-playable characters could think, no scenario was yet written, leading Phil to eventually create a database corresponding to the scenario for each of them. "As a character, what am I the only one to know? Coordinates of a new planet or precious information, for instance," he begins. "Very private databases were put in place according to this idea. You could trigger these by making the alien talk beforehand: there were conditions to satisfy in order to collect precious information through a dialogue. Timers were also implemented to





» [Amiga] Activating hyperspace launches a visually impressive and very colourful sequence.

» [Atari ST] The Croolis Vareux is an alien that's always at war with his other evolutionary branch.

help players who could not make progress fast enough. In this case, some sentences and key information were spotlighted."

As you might have guessed, *Captain Blood*'s production didn't follow a traditional path. R&D was still done at the same time as development. There hadn't been any preproduction to settle everything beforehand as Phil and Didier were still imagining concepts, drawing on restaurants' tablecloths when production had started, meaning that Didier had to program and reprogram on a day-to-day basis. One example of this is that in the first version of *Captain Blood*, the pointing hand you can move around the screen with the mouse would shake after a while, making precise clicking very difficult. "It wasn't a good idea," Phil admits. "We wanted to show that Blood was degenerating with time but in terms of gameplay it was terrible. Players lost a lot of time trying to click on the right spot because of this."

Phil, originally a musician, decided to implement small sampled sounds related to each UPCOM's icon. "Every time an alien would say a particular sentence, the same sounds would be heard. I told myself that someone who would play *Captain Blood* for long hours could understand the meaning of a sentence just by listening to the sampled sounds related to the text. It was great! We even thought about putting music notes under each icon so that you would have to memorise music themes to say something. We eventually didn't go that far though."

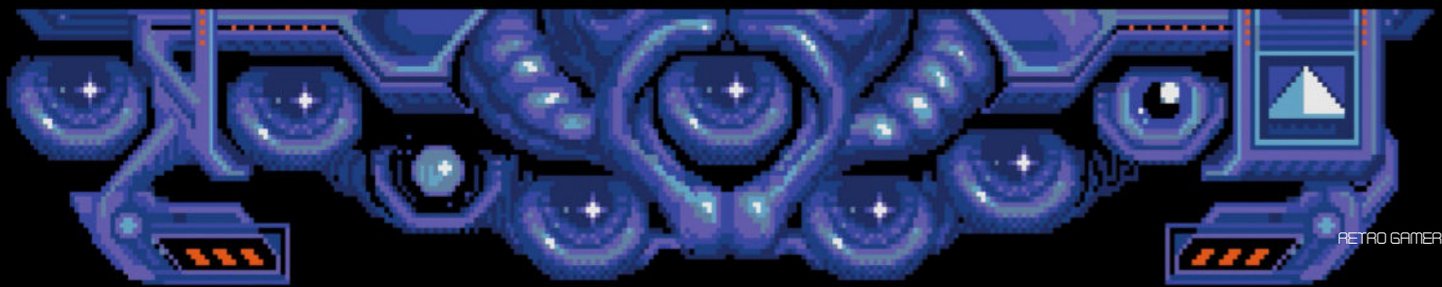
In *Captain Blood*'s introduction sequence, you can listen to some very specific electronic music. Having worked in the French music business for years, Phil had kept many contacts in the industry. Through one of his connections he happened to meet Michel Geiss, Jean-Michel Jarre's right-hand man. "Jean-Michel Jarre had heard about our work and we could get an appointment in Chatou, where his studio was located," explains Phil. "We brought our Atari to show him *Captain Blood*. Jean-Michel was already using Atari devices to create music in MIDI format and pilot his studio. He found the game fantastic. There were already aliens and hyperspace sequences. In his latest album, *Zoolook*, I found four interesting bars of music, and Jean-Michel authorised us to use them."

> "I ALWAYS FELT THAT VIDEOGAME AUTHORS WERE INSIDE THEIR GAMES, FACING THE PLAYERS, LIKE ROLE-PLAYING GAME MASTERS"
> **PHIL ULRICH**

By focussing on *Zoolook*'s first track, *Ethnicolor*, Phil and Didier managed to create four minutes of music. "Jean-Michel was so amazed by the result that he told us he wanted to give us the rights to use them for free worldwide. I didn't believe it at first, but the next morning I received a telex from Francis Dreyfus, his producer, explaining that we could get these necessary rights." Jean-Michel Jarre's music clearly helped give *Captain Blood* a particular aura. "Let's admit it, *Captain Blood* is clearly a UFO in the videogame production at the time," Phil says.

François Lionet is known for having created AMOS Basic for the Amiga and STOS Basic for the Atari ST. In 1987 he moved from Lyon to Paris to attend a tropical medical specialisation at the veterinary school. He was then contacted by ERE Informatique to develop the Commodore 64 conversion of *Captain Blood*. "Porting a game from a 512K memory computer to a 64K one was quite hard!" we're told. "You had to be cunning. For example, during the planetary flight scene what you don't see are the black lines of codes running on top and under the cinemascope set. Computing everywhere was necessary. Besides, the game had to be fully loaded right at the beginning since it was running on a tape. With Yves Lamoureux, who worked on the Amstrad CPC port, we could never make Didier Bouchon explain how he managed to make this flight, depending on routines coded in machine language, so organic, so natural, fluid and biological on the Atari ST. Our versions were more mechanical." François was also in charge of the PC CGA port. "It had to run on as many PCs as possible, and we had to use the normal colour palette, this terrible pale purple. Quite gloomy! I believe I managed to create versions as faithful as they could be to the original, though, in six months time."

While *Captain Blood* would prove to be quite complex on release, it certain found an audience and received a good amount of critical acclaim. It scored 84% in *ST Action*, 91% in *Amiga Format* and an AA Rave in *Amstrad Action*. Perhaps most importantly, *Captain Blood* achieved the universal recognition that Phil desired. ✱



A TRIBUTE TO BEAM SOFTWARE

SET UP BY PUBLISHER MELBOURNE HOUSE, BEAM SOFTWARE MADE HIT AFTER HIT IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES. BEAM COFOUNDER ALFRED MILGROM HELPS RETRO GAMER CELEBRATE THE AUSTRALIAN STUDIO THAT CREATED HUNGRY HORACE, EXPLODING FIST AND SHADOWRUN

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

ALFRED MILGROM
Cofounder of Beam Software and Melbourne House, Alfred Milgrom ran Beam from its inception in 1980 until 2001, following the sale of the studio in 1999. Far from just a figurehead, Alfred designed graphics for Beam's early releases, and had a hands-on role on a number of its later games.

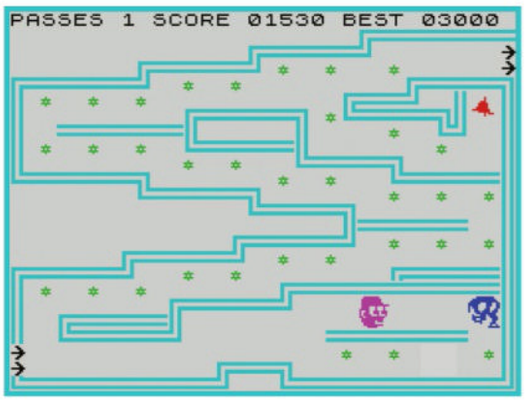
Spun off from book publisher Melbourne House in 1980, Beam Software was established to design games for its sister company to release. After developing for early home computers, Beam helped define the Spectrum throughout 1982, with triumphs like the *Pac-Man*-inspired *Hungry Horace* and the popular text adventure *The Hobbit*.

Beam releases then came thick and fast, with highlights including the platformer *Sir Lancelot* and the mobster sim *Mugsy*. Then in 1985, Beam arguably had its finest hour with *The Way Of The Exploding Fist*, which introduced beat-'em-ups to many gamers. In the same year, Beam continued its success with *The Hobbit* follow-up *Lord Of The Rings: Game One* and the *Elite*-influenced *Starion*.

In 1987, Melbourne House was sold to Mastertronic, allowing Beam to focus on development. The following year, Mastertronic was sold to Virgin, which mothballed the Melbourne House name. Meanwhile, Beam produced the brawlers *Exploding Fist+* and *Samurai Warrior: The Battles Of Usagi Yojimbo*.

The Nineties saw Beam shift to consoles, with titles like *Bill & Ted's Excellent Game Boy Adventure* and *Shadowrun* for the SNES being well received. In 1997, Beam regained the Melbourne House name and used it as a label, before selling it and its games studio to Infogrames in 1999. Finally, in 2006, all that had been Beam was sold to Krome Studios, who ran it as Krome Studios Melbourne until closing it in 2010.

What remains of Beam now is its impressive games library, which reflects not only the quality of output but also the innovations made by the renowned studio.



HUNGRY HORACE

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1982

Although its sales were bolstered by being a Spectrum pack-in title, *Hungry Horace* earned its ubiquity by being one of the system's best *Pac-Man*-inspired titles. Rather than slavishly copying the coin-op, Beam's game enhances its inspiration's basic concept with a set of eclectic mazes.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"The reality of Horace's look is that I was the graphic artist for the character, and I am *not* a graphic artist! His size was dictated by the limitations of the Spectrum, and there was not much I could do in such a small space. I could either make Horace just a head or give him more of a body, and my limited skills dictated a head with a rat's tail on legs."

PENETRATOR

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1982

Arcade companies largely ignored the home-computer game market in the early Eighties, and as a result coin-op clones for computers sold like hot cakes in the nascent games industry. Beam's *Penetrator* stands out from the pack thanks to its quality as much as for being an accurate recreation of Konami's side-scrolling shooter *Scramble*. Early Spectrum games weren't known for their scale or aesthetics, but *Penetrator* manages to excel on both fronts. Players have to bomb and blast their way through five unique levels, each depicted in a different hue, and once beaten they have to be played through in reverse order to complete the game. *Penetrator* also impresses with a virtual fireworks display after each attempt.

HORACE GOES SKIING

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1982

Despite it channelling *Frogger*, *Horace Goes Skiing* has a lot more to it than Konami's coin-op. Its *Frogger* stages have you crossing a busy motorway in order to get to a ski slope, but you first have to buy skis using limited funds. Getting hit by traffic incurs an ambulance charge, as does replacing skis if you break them by hitting a tree. You increase your score by slaloming between flags, and you get cash for every 1,000 points scored. But once your money's gone it's game over.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"The *Horace* games were always based on game concepts that had proven themselves in the arcades or other platforms. I was not sufficiently creative to invent new game paradigms, so the design for *Horace Goes Skiing* was adapted and repackaged from existing game ideas."

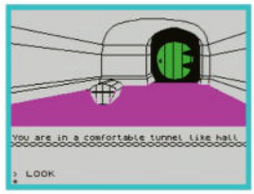
ON THE PISTE — WHY HORACE'S SECOND OUTING WAS SO POPULAR

SURREAL SET-UP
It's crazy that Horace runs across a motorway with his skis before hitting the slopes, but the main thing is that it makes for good gameplay.

ECLECTIC LEVELS
The motorway stages require timing and strategy, whereas the slalom levels require positioning and fast reflexes; a nice combo.

COIN-OP CREDENTIALS
It does no harm to have levels based on an arcade hit like *Frogger*. After all, if you're going to crib then proven gameplay is the way to go.

POLISHED PRESENTATION
Many bought it on its release, but the second *Horace* title was brought to the masses due to being bundled with the Spectrum for several years.



THE HOBBIT

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1982

Beam's adventure by Veronika Megler and Philip Mitchell hits the mark on multiple fronts. It respects its source material, and does so while setting compelling puzzles. It's intuitive to play, in that it goes a way to understanding plain English, and its depictions of Tolkien's book are impressive for the time.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"I was very impressed with adventure games, especially the ones from Scott Adams, such as *Adventureland*. My one reservation was that they relied solely on two-word commands, and I felt we could do better than that. I was also a great fan of *The Hobbit* book, and felt that this was a perfect adventure to be the basis for a text-based adventure game. It took a long time and delicate negotiations to get the Tolkien estate to agree to license it, and they only finally agreed because we said we would package a copy of it with the game."

HORACE AND THE SPIDERS

ZX SPECTRUM • 1983

Building on the eclectic nature of its predecessor, the third *Horace* title has you leaping over spiders, swinging from web to web and bashing arachnids into holes *Space Panic*-style. Its disparate parts may seem slightly disconnected, but there's no doubting the game's overall variety.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"I don't know why *Horace And The Spiders* wasn't as successful as the earlier *Horace* games. The reality is that when creative endeavours are developed everyone does their best to create the best product possible within the time and financial budget. And then it's up to chance. You can be lucky and grab the public imagination, or your creation can be snubbed. It could be the wrong time, a change in expectations, a single bad review or just because the product misses the mark somehow."

SIR LANCELOT

ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC • 1984

In purely financial terms, releasing a game in 1984 that riffed on *Manic Miner* seemed like a no-brainer to many Spectrum developers. Beam's effort in this direction was *Sir Lancelot*, which it somehow shoehorned into just 16K. Its most obvious deviation from Matthew Smith's surreal creation comes from its focus on elevators over leaping between platforms, although you do a bit of that too. More broadly, *Sir Lancelot*'s challenge reflects its inspiration by tasking you with making timed leaps over odd-looking foes and collecting flashing objects to activate exits.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

I believe in taking inspiration from wherever I can. So there was no reason to be restricted to taking inspiration from coin-ops when it came to designing *Sir Lancelot*, and of course we always watched to see what other people were doing."

MEDIAEVAL MAYHEM THE CHALLENGES FACING THE PLUCKY KNIGHT

OBJECT LESSON

Each of *Sir Lancelot*'s stages is peppered with a variety of pulsating items situated in hard-to-reach places. Once you have them all an exit to the next level is revealed.

VARIED VILLAINS

There are as many opponents in *Sir Lancelot* as there are types of collectibles. The knight's enemies range from living cauldrons and geometric shapes to birds and Pac-Man.

PERILOUS PLATFORMING

Sir Lancelot can survive falls from a height, but doing so risks him landing on foes. Making matters worse, the game's platforms can be tiny, making them easy to fall off.

FORWARD PLANNING

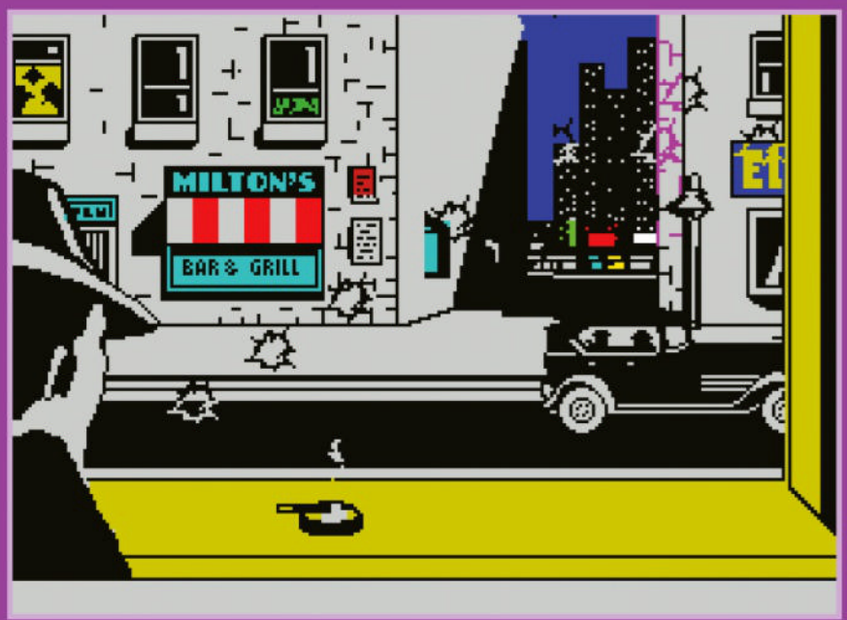
Some of *Sir Lancelot*'s levels require you to collect objects in a certain order. If you miss one and go up to an area you can't get down from then you can't exit the stage.

THE WORD IS THAT ROCCO'S GETTIN' UPPITY. THEY SAY HE WANTS TA MUSCLE IN ON YOUR PATCH, BOSS.
WE TECTED 300 400 CLIENTS T YEAR AND D THEM FOR AN GE OF $2500, E MADE 750 SAND BUCKS.
HOODS 55 CUSTOMERS 411
DOUGH IN DA SAFE $1344
HOODS 40 CUSTOMERS 400
DOUGH IN DA SAFE $0

MUGSY

ZX SPECTRUM • 1984

There's no straightforward way to describe *Mugsy*, mainly because it dips its toe into a few different genres, but also because it has a relatively unique presentation. Its full-screen visuals bring to mind a text adventure, and you do mainly dictate your actions by typing in numbers, but Beam's game doesn't set puzzles or require exploration like a text-based adventure would. Other elements of the gangster sim bring to mind turn-based strategy titles, in that *Mugsy* is split into turns representing a year of a mob boss' life, where strategic decisions decide his crew's earnings and whether he lives to fight another day. This last aspect can involve an arcade-style challenge, where if a hit is put out on the player character a firefight ensues, where you have to give better than you get in order to survive. There's also management and levelling-up involved in your efforts to make ever-increasing profits, in so much as your spending decisions affect your men's firepower and morale, the size of your client base and your uneasy relationship with local law enforcers.



GANGSTER GAMEPLAY THE LOW-DOWN ON THE INNOVATIVE MOB SIM

SINISTER SYNDICATE

At the start of each game year you buy clients from a syndicate for a price set by the godfather.

ILLICIT INSURANCE

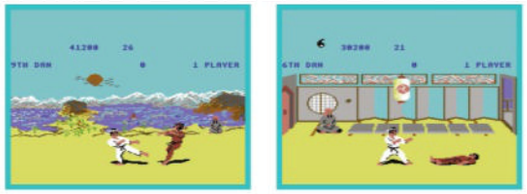
The point of buying clients is that you can then charge them for protection from other criminals.

HOODLUM OVERHEADS

Your gangsters need to be armed, and if you cut corners they might get killed or leave your gang.

POLICE PROBLEMS

Raids are expensive if the police target your safe, so it pays to give them a decent annual bribe.



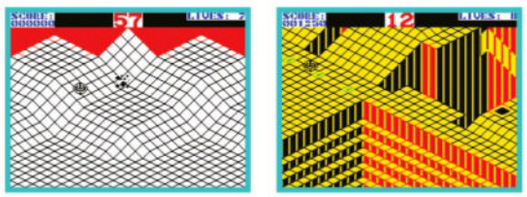
THE WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

C64, VARIOUS • 1985

The success of *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* can partially be explained by the fact that it makes martial arts look cool. Its fights have the feel of a Bruce Lee movie, unlike those of its arcade inspiration *Karate Champ*, which adopts a more comedic tone. *Fist* impresses with its immersive music and its sound effects as much as its smoothly animated, well-defined visuals. Aside from these aesthetics, the game features a wealth of attacks and evasive manoeuvres that can be performed in quick succession. Positioning of your fighter is equally important, as is responding to your opponent's moves with counter-attacks as they attempt to counter yours.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"We knew that *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* was going to be huge when people in the company kept on playing it. I would attribute the success of the game to Gregg Barnett, who programmed it and designed it. The range and the combinations of moves in the game was a big part of its appeal, and those were designed by Gregg. The other major appeal of the game was its great graphics."



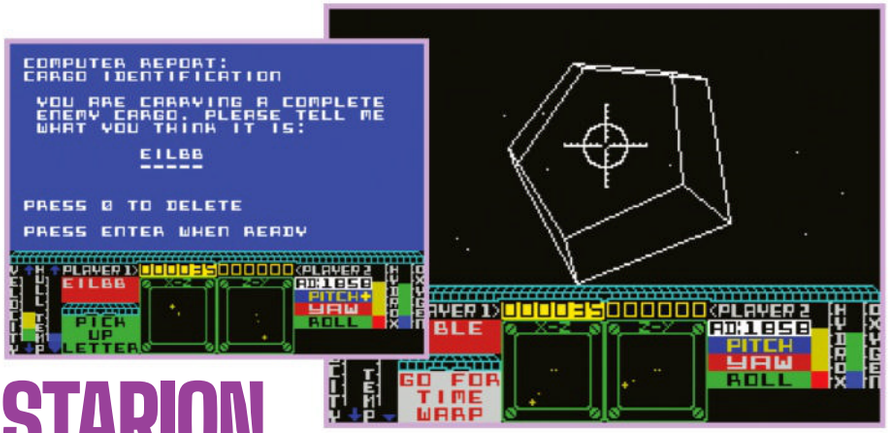
GYROSCOPE

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1985

Clearly *Gyroscope* takes its lead from the Atari coin-op *Marble Madness*. The look of Beam's game comes directly from it, as do the physics governing the movements of the gyroscope that gives it its name. It is, however, differentiated from its muse in various ways. First and foremost, *Gyroscope* has a unique set of level designs that freeze your gyroscope in place and scroll downwards a whole screen's height to reveal the next section when you reach the bottom of the screen. In *Marble Madness* the screen gradually scrolls downwards, requiring you to control your marble as you go. Gyroscope's obstacles and opponents also differ from *Marble Madness*', in that Beam's game has static rather than moving obstructions and far less enemies to contend with.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"In the first place, although there were some obvious similarities between *Gyroscope* and *Marble Madness* – they both had an object rolling down a course with some obstacles, we were confident that we did not breach copyright. In the second place, we were not in a position to *license Marble Madness*."


COMPUTER REPORT:
CARGO IDENTIFICATION
YOU ARE CARRYING A COMPLETE ENEMY CARGO. PLEASE TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK IT IS:
EILBB
PRESS 0 TO DELETE
PRESS ENTER WHEN READY
PICK UP LETTER
GO FOR TIME WARP

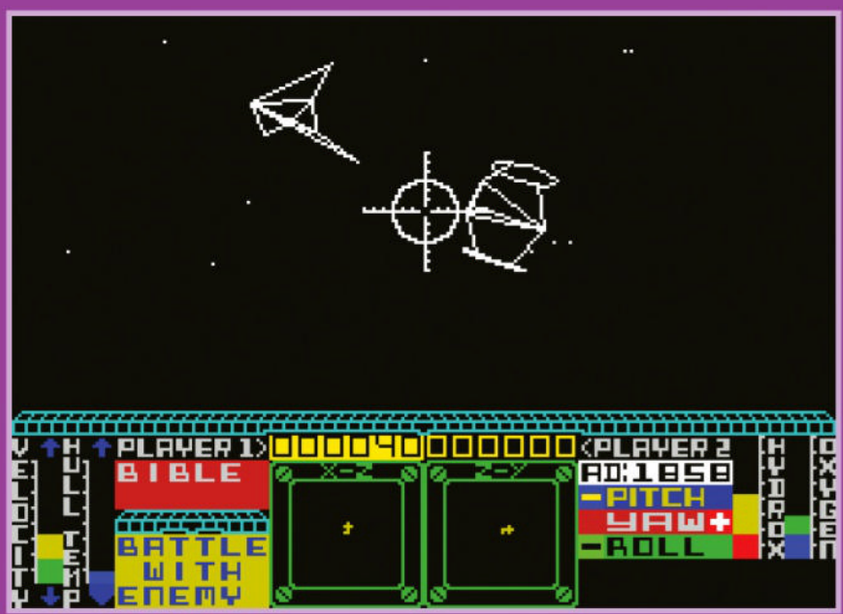
STARION

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1985

Starion might look like *Elite*, but Beam's space shooter has very different gameplay from Acornsoft's. There are enemies to take down – like in *Elite* – but the similarities end there. Once destroyed, your time-altering foes drop their cargo, which takes the form of letters. A complete set will provide you with an anagram to rearrange, with the deciphered word being a clue to the time period where the cargo is needed. Once delivered, history is fixed in that era, leaving just 242 more to correct!

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"Although *Starion* was published by Melbourne House, it was not *developed* by Melbourne House. David Webb submitted the completed game to us. The entire concept was David's idea, and I was very impressed with his programming capabilities. So we agreed to publish it, but unfortunately no further games resulted from the relationship."



GALAXY GUIDE HOW TO ACE THE PUZZLE-BASED SPACE SHOOTER

EPIC EXPLORATION

Space is vast, and in *Starion* you travel not only through space but also through time – to hundreds of different periods in history.

STRAIGHT SHOOTER

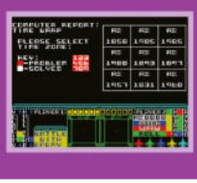
Hand-eye coordination and reflexes are key to blasting foes in *Starion*; their agility means that if you blink you miss them.

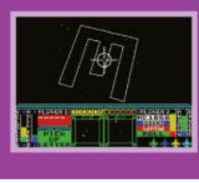
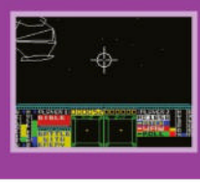
WORD SEARCH

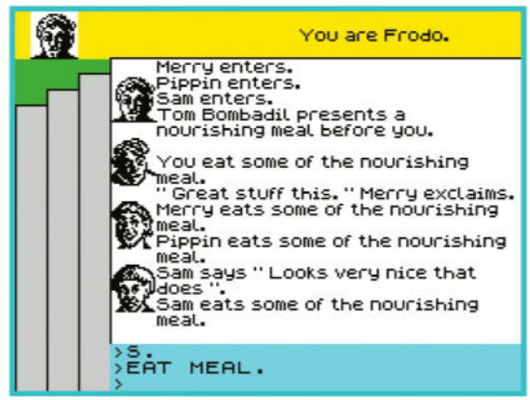
When you destroy the enemies in *Starion* they drop cargo in the form of letters. You have to collect these and make a word from them.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Flying too fast or firing your lasers constantly for too long raises your hull temperature, and if it overheats your craft explodes.




You are Frodo.
Merry enters.
Pippin enters.
Sam enters.
Tom Bombadil presents a nourishing meal before you.
You eat some of the nourishing meal.
" Great stuff this. " Merry exclaims.
Merry eats some of the nourishing meal.
Pippin eats some of the nourishing meal.
Sam says " Looks very nice that does ".
Sam eats some of the nourishing meal.
>S.
>EAT MEAL.

LORD OF THE RINGS: GAME ONE

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1985

You can control all four of the hobbits in *Lord Of The Rings*: Game One or make some of them non-player characters, and then instruct them when required. In either case, their progress is depicted on-screen. Beam's game closely follows Tolkien's *Fellowship Of The Ring*, but where it diverges, the events that unfold are in keeping with the author's fiction.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"*Fellowship Of The Ring* was a much more complex story than *The Hobbit* to try to adapt into a text adventure. We were fortunate with *The Hobbit*, because it had a relatively straightforward narrative path and a simple goal, and it fitted well into known storyline structures. Moreover, its characters were easy to understand and visualise – ie goblins, trolls, orcs, Gollum, Smaug and so on. I will also admit that we missed the creative genius of Veronika Megler in crafting the puzzles in *Lord Of The Rings*. The scenarios and puzzles she created for *The Hobbit* were major factors in its success."

Terrormolinos Airport. You cannot understand any of the signs. Geeks like these Spaniards have a different word for EVERYTHING!
SOUTH
You are on a coach taking you to the centre of Terrormolinos.
Mr Sharpsky is leading a mass rendition of "Roll out the barrel".
Now that he no longer has a sick-bag to play with, little Jack is being copiously sick all over the coach.
Pics taken 00 Successful pics 00
Your score is 17% in 0045 turns

TERRORMOLINOS

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1985

Most events in *Terrormolinos* are depicted using words only, so Beam's holiday from hell text adventure relies on the interest generated by written descriptions of what's going on. Thankfully these observations are hilarious, so much so that you embrace the frantic rush to find your passport, tickets and family, and get them into a taxi to the airport. Once your flight gets to Spain the real fun starts: have you brought a knotted hanky and tummy tablets? If not then prepare for sunburn and diarrhoea! While fending these off you have to take ten top-notch photos to show everyone back home – assuming you brought your camera.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"In the case of *Terrormolinos* we were lucky. Who knows why it was a success? Maybe the public enjoyed the pitfalls of a holiday that they could not afford themselves. Or maybe it was just fun to play. You tell me!"

FIGHTING WARRIOR

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1985

As the follow-up to *Exploding Fist*, there were expectations set on *Fighting Warrior* that weren't really fair. It's an entirely different game, and it should be judged as such. Where *Fist* has static stages, *Fighting Warrior* has horizontal scrolling after each bout, leading to a sense of progression through an adventure rather than an ascent through levels of achievement. Where *Fist* has multiple attacks to learn, *Fighting Warrior* has just three, making speed of delivery more important than fighting strategy. Perhaps most importantly, in *Fighting Warrior* the hero and his foes have energy bars, unlike in *Fist*, and the hero's energy bar isn't always replenished between battles.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"We were keen to release another fighting game following the success of *The Way Of The Exploding Fist*, and although we were working on a proper sequel to that it required a lot of time. In the meantime, we wanted to capitalise on the demand for fighting games, but in retrospect releasing *Fighting Warrior* was a mistake, as it cost us a lot of goodwill."

MARTIAL MECHANICS KEY ASPECTS OF THE SCROLLING SLASH-'EM-UP

COOL MOVES

■ Each attack in *Fighting Warrior* has a defence; for low strikes you jump, for mid strikes you back off and for upper strikes you duck.

CONTINUED COMBAT

■ In *Fighting Warrior*, the damage taken and the distance walked to the right in one bout affects your energy and position in the next.

FIERCE FOES

■ The enemies have human bodies with the heads of savage animals, and they're fast and furious in combat. So be prepared!

HELLISH HAZARDS

■ As well as poison arrows that only harm the player character, *Fighting Warrior* has vases that can sap his energy if he smashes them.

FIST II: THE LEGEND CONTINUES

C64, VARIOUS • 1986

The fighting in *Fist II* is similar to its predecessor's in terms of attacks and defensive moves, but there are energy bars instead of knockouts and a timer. *Fist II*'s battles are also just one part of the game rather than the entire premise, with the remainder of its challenge taking the form of an arcade adventure. Unlike the original, *Fist II* involves navigating a huge scrolling area, although your quest involves fighting opponents *Exploding Fist*-style. There are also obstacles to overcome and your stamina to maintain, both of which are related to shrines. When you meditate in these your energy is restored, and if you've found a scroll marked with the same symbol as marked on the shrine then you learn a new skill. There are eight abilities, including the power to light up dark areas, survive poisonous gas and destroy obstructive rocks with your bare hands.

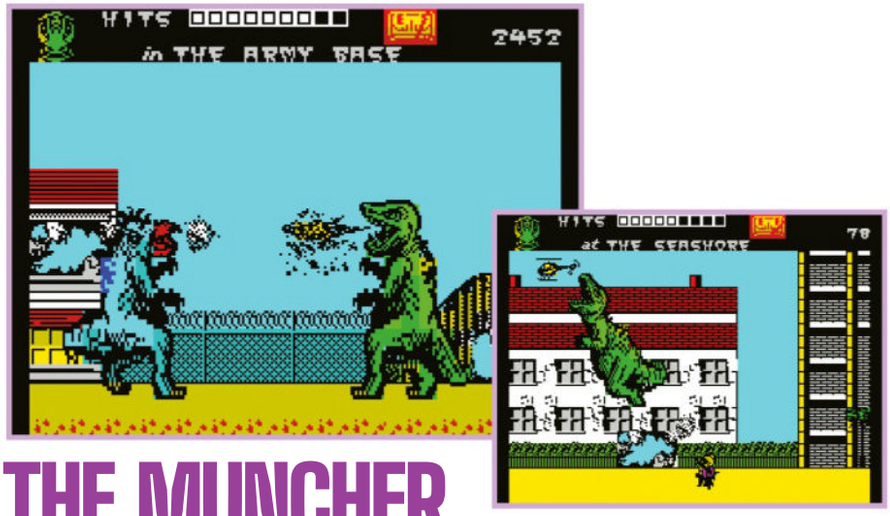
SAMURAI WARRIOR: THE BATTLES OF USAGI YOJIMBO

C64, VARIOUS • 1988

Beam's side-scrolling slash-'em-up tells the story of an anthropomorphic samurai comic-book hero in videogame form. Battles are common, but not every character that's encountered should be fought with. In fact, brawling with unarmed or harmless characters reduces the hero's karma, and if it hits zero he commits ritual suicide and the game ends. Karma can be enhanced too, by carrying out good deeds such as giving money to peasants. This can be taken from defeated foes or won by gambling at inns.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"We just loved the *Usagi Yojimbo* comic books. As well as that, one of the avenues I was keen to explore as a publisher of games was how to extend the emotional range of computer games. One familiar trope was 'rescue the princess', but I felt that if computer games were going to expand beyond a niche market they needed to have more emotional depth. Adding exploration and karma to a fighting game seemed to be a step in the right direction."



THE MUNCHER

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1988

Taking its cue from *Godzilla* and Bally Midway's *Rampage* coin-op and tied in with the sweet Chewits, *The Muncher* has you take on the role of an enraged T-rex intent on destroying Japan one location at a time. There are nine for you to take your frustrations out on, beginning with a seashore where you stomp out of the ocean to the horror of innocent bystanders. Soon enough the Japanese armed forces are alerted to the fact that the building-sized dinosaur under your control is eating pedestrians, crushing cars and bringing down buildings, which results in you having to deal with parachuting marksmen, helicopters dropping bombs and tanks firing missiles. There are also other monsters to take on in boss-fight intermissions, and of course there's a reason for the protagonist's rage. More specifically, Japanese archaeologists have taken her eggs, making part of your objective to find them and put them somewhere radioactive, which makes sense if you use *Godzilla* science.

MONSTER MADNESS

TOP TIPS ON LEAVING A TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION

COLLATERAL DAMAGE
■ Almost anything can be destroyed for points, but eating parachutists also replenishes your fire breath and eating pedestrians also boosts your energy.

ASSORTED ATTACKS
■ As well as punching in four directions, you can breathe fire, kick buildings while clinging onto them and bite flying foes from the ground or mid-jump.

REGULAR REFUELLING
■ You have limited energy and fireballs, but you can increase your stamina by munching nuclear waste and restore your fiery breath by eating oil tankers.

EGG EXPEDITION
■ You take any eggs you find to nuclear waste dumps to hatch. If you die then you take charge of the dinosaur that most recently emerged from its shell.

BEDLAM

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1988

On first inspection, *Bedlam* appears to be a vertically scrolling take on *Uridium*, but there's a lot more to Beam's shooter than that initial assessment might suggest. First and foremost, aside from soaring over dreadnought-like battleships, your ship traverses islands of floating cosmic debris and the surfaces of cratered alien worlds, where you can pick off indigenous life forms for target practice and extra points. *Bedlam* is peppered with collectible power-ups in the form of extra lives, greater firepower, smart bombs and limited-time invincibility – there's even a pick-up that transports you to a pinball subgame! There are also huge bosses to contend with at the end of each stage, which unlike standard enemies take numerous shots to take down. Not that the regular opponents are a pushover, far from it. They attack in numbers, and their attack patterns vary from one type to the next. The game's final boss is accompanied by multiple fleets of these drones, making it particularly tricky to take out.

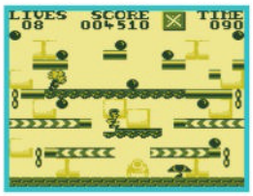
EXPLODING FIST+

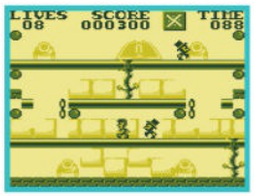
C64, VARIOUS • 1988

Describing *Fist+* as a take on *IK+* doesn't do either game any justice. The combat in *Exploding Fist* feels very different to the fighting in *International Karate*, and so adding an extra combatant to one of those games doesn't produce the same experience as introducing a third fighter to the other. *Fist+* has other points of difference too: all three of its characters can be controlled by players and its downtown setting is unique to the Beam follow-up. It also adds a somersault move to those brought back from its predecessors, a female announcer and a third-person bonus round, where you fend off ninjas by throwing shurikens at them.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"Personally I think that it's very difficult to create a sequel that lives up to or surpasses a successful original. Unrealistic fan expectations can lead to dissatisfaction. As well you must remember that times change. When *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* was released it was relatively unique. But things then changed over time, as other developers incorporated some of the features of *Exploding Fist* into their games, and ultimately the genre was no longer so unique or desirable."





BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT GAME BOY ADVENTURE

GAME BOY • 1991

One of the fortunate side-effects of the Game Boy going strong through the Nineties despite having tech more suited to an Eighties system was that it made it a perfect host for formats that had fallen out of fashion. Take the single-screen platformer, a staple of early Eighties gaming that had been replaced by scrolling equivalents by the Nineties. *Bill & Ted's Excellent Game Boy Adventure* is just that, and it suits its host hardware perfectly. Its heroes and villains are themed around the movies, of course, but otherwise it's a showcase for all the staples found in the likes of *Manic Miner*. Think dissolving platforms, conveyor belts, on-rails enemies and collecting flashing objects, and you have a good idea of Beam's platformer.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"I loved the movie *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*, but that had nothing to do with us developing a Game Boy game based on the film. The licence to develop the game was obtained by Acclaim Entertainment, who then commissioned us to develop the game. I think they were happy with it, even though it was not a blockbuster success."

SHADOWRUN

SNES • 1993

Best described as an action point-and-click adventure with RPG elements, Beam's SNES-exclusive takes influence from *Blade Runner*, while adding concepts such as magic powers and cyberspace. You explore its isometric playfield and battle hostile characters in an arcade-style format, with gun fights facilitated by moving a cursor to where you want to shoot. Dispatching enemies gets you Karma Points, which you can spend on boosting your character's stats, skills and magic. Many characters you meet are harmless, and some have useful information that advances your investigation. A point-and-click interface is used to both talk to them and search *Shadowrun*'s dystopian world for useful items.

ALFRED'S MEMORIES

"As you are probably aware, *Shadowrun* was critically acclaimed, but it was not a financial success – or at least not for Beam Software. I cannot recall if the licence we had obtained was limited in scope or whether the licence just lapsed. But in any case, we did not have the desire or the financial resources to create a version for the Mega Drive."

CHOPLIFTER III: RESCUE SURVIVE

SNES • 1994

Beam's SNES sequel has a lot more to it than either the firm's earlier Game Boy title *Choplifter II* or Dan Gorlin's original. As you would expect, *Choplifter III* has far superior visuals, music and sound effects, but as well as that its level designs and gameplay mark it out as a major evolution from its predecessors. Each of its stages are located in different environments with unique challenges and bosses. You start off in the Amazon, where you face ground troops, fixed armaments and an insanely big cannon for a boss. The subsequent levels take place in desert caverns, over a stretch of ocean protected by battleships and in a war torn city. As you progress through the levels you get pick-ups by blasting crates attached to falling parachutes and swooping in to collect them, you can also relieve them from defeated opponents. As well as an array of special weapons, the collectibles offered include shields, rope ladders and extra lives. The final concessions to difficulty that differentiate *Choplifter III* from the earlier games are an energy bar instead of one-hit deaths and single-use repair depots that take care of damage done in battle.

HORACE GOES TYPING

Before Beam paid homage to *Frogger* with *Horace Goes Skiing*, two Melbourne House books with type-in listings gave technically minded Spectrum owners a sneak preview of the motorway section of Horace's second outing. *Over The Spectrum* contains listings for various BASIC games, including *Freeway Frog*, which looks a lot like Horace's road crossing antics, except that it lacks Horace and a ski shack, and its traffic isn't isometric. *Spectrum Machine Language For The Absolute Beginner* not only contains a much faster machine code version of *Freeway Frog*, but it's also edited by William Tang – the coder of *Horace Goes Skiing*.

Datasette fact

■ The 1531 Datasette looks similar and has a black plastic shell. It was intended primarily for the Commodore 16 and Plus/4 models, but fits the Commodore 64 and earlier machines with an adapter.

Datasette

» **PLATFORM:** Various » **YEAR:** 1981 » **COST:** £40 (launch), £15+ (today, boxed), £10+ (today, unboxed)

If you're going to adopt a common storage method across a range of computers, it makes sense to make the hardware as widely compatible as possible – and that's just what Commodore did with the Datasette, known by the model numbers 1530 and C2N. The technology was originally integrated into the Commodore PET, but external tape decks soon became available. The model featured here was introduced to match the styling of the new VIC-20, with the form factor retained for years to come with the introduction of new compatible machines such as the Commodore 64 and Commodore 128.

The Datasette isn't a particularly fast storage device, with a typical speed of just 60-70 bytes per second thanks to an emphasis on reliability over speed. Fortunately, programmers got creative with fast loader routines to ease the painfully long waiting times between you and your favourite games. Though American users and publishers overwhelmingly backed the floppy disk drive, cassettes became the preferred media for Commodore 64 games in the UK due to their low price and, if we're being totally honest, the ease of copying them.

ESSENTIAL GAME

KAMIKAZE

What do you pick when you have the entire Commodore 64 cassette library available? We've decided on a budget game, as they embody the low-cost philosophy behind the use of cassettes. This Codemasters shoot-'em-up takes plenty of inspiration from Namco's arcade game *Sky Kid* – your first objective is to retrieve some dynamite and pilot your plane into a building, in order to bust the gate open. Once you've done that, you can proceed to rescue the hostages that emerge from the building, in order to move on to the next stage.

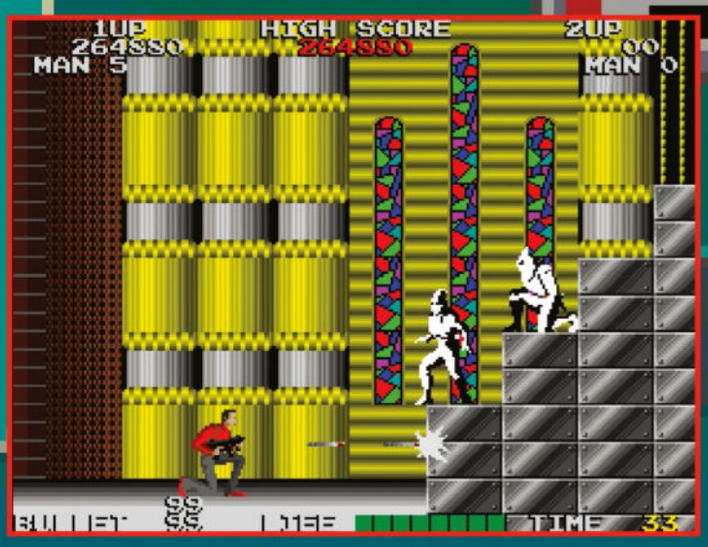
SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

ULTIMATE GUIDE

ROLLING THUNDER

HAVE YOU EVER DREAMED OF BECOMING A SECRET AGENT? OF COURSE YOU HAVE, AND IN 1986, NAMCO GAVE GAMERS EVERYWHERE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE OUT THIS EXCITING DOUBLE LIFE. YOUR MISSION: INFILTRATE AN EVIL SECRET SOCIETY AND RESCUE YOUR FELLOW AGENT. LET THE THUNDER ROLL!

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON



» [Arcade] Church-like stained glass windows appear in the background as Albatross approaches Maboo.

The mid-Eighties brought a nadir to the *James Bond* movies. Roger Moore had finally hung up his PPK after appearing in *A View To Kill* at the grand old age of 57, and the search for a new Bond was on. Yet despite the travails of the series, the public's interest in espionage and spy movies remained as high as ever.

Meanwhile, the famous Japanese arcade manufacturer Namco was also enduring a lull of sorts. Having made its name with arcade hits such as *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian* and *Dig Dug*, the company was beginning to diversify into home consoles, specifically the Nintendo Entertainment System. While its mid-Eighties output remained solid, it failed to live up to the fame of its earlier games. Could combining these two flagging behemoths produce a winning formula?

Released in late-1986, *Rolling Thunder* uses Namco's System 86 board. The technology had already seen action throughout the year, most notably in a brace of sequels, *Sky Kid Deluxe* and *Hopping Mappy* – now it was being tested on a brand-new IP, a run-and-gun game set within the world of international espionage.

In *Rolling Thunder*, it's the Sixties, and the player is Albatross, an elite member of the World Crime Police Organisation's (WCPO's) Rolling Thunder unit. While on a mission to uncover the crimes of a secret society called Geldra and its leader Maboo, Rolling Thunder agent Leila Blitz is kidnapped. Albatross' mission is to infiltrate Geldra's base and rescue Leila while thwarting its other devilish plans. With its green skin, pointy ears, bald head and red eyes, Maboo is distinctly alien in appearance, although this is never entirely clarified in the game.

» [Arcade] Well done, agent. Now, get going!

> "TIERTEX TOOK PHOTOS OF ITS ARCADE MACHINE AND POSTED THEM TO US"
> ***LEIGH CHRISTIAN***

Rolling Thunder begins with Albatross in a large building that conceals Geldra's base. However, there's no sneaking about for this secret agent, as the society's army of henchmen soon detects his presence. Albatross is armed with a standard Rolling Thunder issue pistol and a healthy supply of ammunition; should this run out, he can only fire one slower shot at a time. Fortunately, doors dot each level, some containing ammunition caches (marked BULLET) and an upgrade to a powerful submachine gun (ARMS).

These weapons and ammo are massively helpful because *Rolling Thunder* is populated by a vast and deadly array of opponents, often appearing from behind those doors. Each regular enemy wears a hood and uniform, and these identify the characteristics and threat they carry. The grunt of this army is the Purple Hood. Get too close to these goons, and they

KEEP ROLLING, ROLLING

ROLLING THUNDER'S SEQUELS

ROLLING THUNDER 2

This official 1990 sequel takes the series to the modern day and introduces co-operative play, adding the first game's hostage, Leila Blitz, as a playable character. There are also more weapons, complex levels and a sci-fi sheen, and the gameplay retains the essential spirit that made the original so popular, contained within a much greater variety of background scenery. The excellent Mega Drive conversion adds even more levels and weapons.

ROLLING THUNDER 3

Albatross and Leila are off on another mission, so this time round, you play Jay, and he wields a mean knife for, y'know, close encounters. A Mega Drive exclusive, this third game smooths out many of the difficulty issues that plagued the first two games – for example, the agent can now fire while jumping – and complements the gameplay with some marvellously detailed graphics. A hidden Mega Drive gem.

THUNDERJAWS

While not an official game, it's hard to imagine Atari wasn't looking at the *Rolling Thunder* series as it was developing this underwater spy caper. End-of-level bosses and swimming levels aside, it's painfully similar to the Namco legend, down to the player character's smart leap up and down the platforms. Check out our Ultimate Guide to *ThunderJaws* inside issue 184 of **Retro Gamer**.

» [Arcade] Giant bats? Why not?

> "WORKING DURING THE SUMMER HOLIDAY AT 16 WAS SOMETIMES CHALLENGING, AS MOST KIDS WERE OUT PLAYING"
> ***LEIGH CHRISTIAN***

unleash a powerful punch that relieves half of Albatross' energy – however, these masked villains can usually be disposed of safely from a distance. Albatross will also encounter Yellow Hoods early on, and while similarly unarmed, they can withstand two shots from his pistol, crouching down when hit, making their elimination slightly trickier.

The next set of henchmen are armed – the cads! Shrouded in orange and blue hoods, these are reluctant assailants initially and only fire when standing up, meaning Albatross can easily duck their shots. Beware, however: in a striking nod to realism, one hit from an enemy bullet loses the special agent a life, totally depleting the energy bar at the bottom of the screen. Weirdly, while possessing eight green blocks, each physical hit removes four blocks, making it similar to Capcom's *Ghosts 'N Goblins* – two strikes, and you lose a life.

The elite version of the enemies, sporting green jumpsuits and white hoods or an all-brown ensemble, can fire both standing and crouched, making them highly dangerous opponents. Finally, white-suited with a grey hood or brown-suited with a green hood means watch out as these nefarious villains chuck grenades at Albatross, often from an unreachable higher platform. Alas, these aren't the only obstacles in your way: *Rolling Thunder*'s hooded ninjas begin their assault at the end of level two and are soon armed and capable of withstanding up to three bullets. The two different flavours of henchmen net 300 and 500 points, while the creepy ninjas secure 700 points.

» [Arcade] Falling in lava pits spell instant death.

» [Arcade] The caverns contain some of *Rolling Thunder*'s trickiest moments.

Each stage of *Rolling Thunder* contains multiple levels and increasingly lethal traps. Fortunately, Albatross, as his slender figure suggests, is an athletic chap, able to leap across gaps and over bullets, duck and acrobatically jump onto any platform above. Level one is set inside Geldra's cover premises, a dilapidated warehouse. Next up is a factory complex, Albatross weaving his way up and across while dodging increasingly aggressive enemies, before the agent ventures into the caverns beneath. Here, the full extent of Geldra's devilry becomes clear: mutated creatures known as Blogas, blazing Fire Men, giant bats and sleek panthers join the fight against Albatross. Each of these requires different tactics: the hunchbacked Blogas skip athletically and

» [Arcade] Pop in for some ammo.

» [Arcade] This cavern is notably different – and harder – in Story 2.

CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW DOES SPECIAL AGENT ALBATROSS FARE AWAY FROM THE ARCADES?

AMSTRAD CPC

The odd decent sprite aside, this visually garish game amputates the original's thrills by being so turgid. The levels are cramped, and the keys are unresponsive in places, but it's just about good enough to raise it above Tiertex's usual fare. Not that that's saying much, sadly.

ATARI ST

Another sluggish port – the characters defy gravity when floating down from platforms – that looks the part but fails to replicate the spirit of the fast-paced original. A shrill, annoying tune completes another disappointing Tiertex-shaped package for Atari ST fans.

C64

While there's a nub of playability, the crude graphics and slow gameplay prevent it from becoming more than average. While it retains the caverns' burnt umber tint, certain aspects are missing. Nonetheless, it's probably the best of the 8-bit home-computer ports.

AMIGA

Oh dear. While awarded decent scores upon release, this Amiga port is a bit of a dog to play. Some winsome loading and title screens lure the player in, and the graphics replicate the original well enough; its pace is interminable, however, even compared to the Spectrum game.

NES

Ported by Arc Co, this Nintendo game is comfortably the best of *Rolling Thunder*'s home conversions. While all the characters have an odd super-slim profile, it – finally! – plays as perkily as the arcade game and even has its end-of-level cutscenes. A super-tough, yet fine game.

ZX SPECTRUM

Rolling Thunder's lack of variety is worse on the Spectrum, with the caverns' brown hue the same yellow as every other level. Most enemies are gone, too, but all ten levels are present, more or less. There's no final fight, either – Albatross shoots Maboo in the back, and the game loops around.

LEILA'S STORY

THE WOES OF ALBATROSS' COLLEAGUE, TOLD IN CUTSCENES AT THE END OF EACH LEVEL

■ Secret Agent Leila Blitz is suddenly discovered and chased by Geldra's hooded villains. She runs.

■ But she cannot escape the numerous thugs, who grab the agent, dragging her off to meet Maboo.

■ Leila is tied and hung up as some sort of trophy – or bait – inside Maboo's church-like lair.

DEVELOPER Q&A

RETRO GAMER PULLS BACK THE HOOD OF ARTIST LEIGH CHRISTIAN TO CHAT ROLLING THUNDER AND TIERTEX

WERE YOU ARTISTIC GROWING UP?
Yes, I've always been drawing since childhood. My mum worked at a newsagents that rented videos, so I used to copy the front covers. I also had a ton of that old computer printing paper that came on a roll, so a friend and I would create these huge space battles, using erasers to destroy each other's ships. I guess it was a precursor to videogames, simultaneously art and a game, satisfying two of my highest values.

HOW DID YOU BEGIN WORKING WITH TIERTEX?
A friend of mine, Nick Pavis, and myself made a game called *Amos*, named after my girlfriend's surname for some reason. It was a *Breakout* clone with a bouncing spring. I don't remember thinking it was any good, but it certainly paved the way for us both to embark on a career in the industry without any qualifications! We sent it to a few companies, and Tiertex liked the graphics and asked if we could do some graphics for them. I was 16, and that was our break into the industry.

SIXTEEN! WHAT DID YOUR PARENTS THINK?
My mum always seemed to let me do pretty much whatever I wanted without ever pushing me in any direction. I think she wanted me to be an architect, something respectable with a good income. At the time, nobody could foresee the rise of the gaming industry, but once she saw the money coming in, she always thought working with Nick was a good influence. Despite being a single mum on benefits, she bought me my first 48K Spectrum, so I have much to be grateful for.

WHAT WERE YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF TIERTEX?
They were in Manchester, a three-hour drive from Rugby. I only remember going once or twice. The office was fairly bland, but they had real arcade games there, and Donald Prince, the CEO, had a Toyota Supra, which impressed me!

HAD YOU PLAYED ROLLING THUNDER?
I may have seen it, but I was probably too busy on *Track & Field*! It's OK, but quite tricky, and I prefer *Kung-Fu Master*.

YOU HELPED CREATE MANY VERSIONS – HOW DID THE PROCESS DIFFER?
Each platform had its limitations. The Commodore 64 was my least favourite because its resolution was so poor, with large double-width and fat pixels, making it difficult to create accurate sprites. The Spectrum had colour limitations as you could only use two colours within each 8x8 square, and there were only eight colours. However, the Amiga had hundreds of colours and a high resolution, which was perfect. We used an Amstrad and an art package called OCP Art Studio and had to make the art using a keyboard as mice were unavailable.

HOW DID IT WORK WITH TIERTEX, BEARING IN MIND THE DISTANCE?
Tiertex took photos of its arcade machine and posted them to us; we then returned disks with the art. Sounds prehistoric now! Eventually, we got a modem, which was very exotic at the time, and sent the art over by phone.

LOOK AT THE CONVERSIONS NOW, HOW DO YOU THINK YOU DID IN RETROSPECT?
Given the circumstances and age, I'm still quite proud of my art. I'm still making games 35 years later, and the industry has grown every year, so we were definitely onto something. Working during the summer holiday at 16 was sometimes challenging, as most kids were out playing – but getting paid enough to buy myself a car when I passed my test made up for it.

» [Arcade] *Rolling Thunder*'s difficulty soon ramps up.

» [Arcade] The game begins with Maboo's evil cackle.

» [Arcade] Albatross is impressively nimble in every respect, bar one: climbing stairs.

■ Desperate to discover Rolling Thunder's secrets, Maboo tortures Leila with electricity.

■ Finally, Albatross and Leila are happily reunited and will both appear in Namco's sequel.

» [Arcade] By the end of scene two, Albatross is battling ninja thugs.

usually need a crouched shot to kill them; the giant bats circle menacingly, waiting for what seems an age to strike; conversely, the shiny black panthers spring instantly at the agent, jaws at the ready.

Having made his way through the deadly caverns, the agent finally reaches Maboo's lair, a convoluted mix of platforms and paths that test him to his very limit. The giant video screen appears, but there's no Maboo. *Rolling Thunder* now commences Story 2 and loops back to the first level – only the enemies are meaner and rife, and there are traps, such as lasers, waiting to kill Albatross instantly. Additionally, the timer, hitherto largely irrelevant, comes into play as caution and aggression require careful balancing. Only the greatest and most determined agent will make it to the church-like hide-out at the end of Story 2. Geldra's leader – and Leila – await Albatross' arrival.

Released in 1986, *Rolling Thunder's* success ensured sequels and home ports, particularly in America (licensed by Atari). The latter followed in 1987, with US Gold obtaining the rights and asking its development partner, Tiertex, to work on 8-bit and 16-bit interpretations of Namco's game. Away from the home computers, Atari's home division, Tengen, produced probably the best of the lot, a NES port that boasts a wonderfully dramatic cover. Namco itself released a direct arcade sequel in 1990, fast-forwarding the plot to the Nineties, introducing co-operative play and a more futuristic feel to its characters and levels while retaining the same gameplay, such as the two-hit energy bar and ammo rooms. *Rolling Thunder* skipped the arcades for its third outing in 1993, creating a more cinematic experience for Sega Mega Drive owners. Sadly, this game didn't see a release outside North America.

As with many of Namco's arcade games, the people behind the game are, like Geldra, shrouded in mystery beyond the likely involvement of Namco's sound designer, Junko Ozawa. *Rolling Thunder*'s influence is also considerable: a year later, Sega launched its renowned *Shinobi* series, taking the template of the Namco game and morphing it into a ninja adventure. Additionally, *Rolling Thunder*'s cover mechanics – the player is frequently required to duck down behind crates or in stacks of tyres – set a new standard in gameplay repeated often throughout the 16-bit period. Given its post-golden-era position, *Rolling Thunder* is a fantastic, if challenging, spy adventure in which the hero lacks a certain Bondian resistance to punches and bullets. After all, not quite up to the standard, then, of the quinquagenarian star of *A View To A Kill*. ★

» [Arcade] The final battle against the malevolent Maboo.

"DONALD PRINCE, THE CEO [OF TIERTEX], HAD A TOYOTA SUPRA, WHICH IMPRESSED ME!"
LEIGH CHRISTIAN

» [Arcade] Geldra's nefarious plans soon become clear.

Super Fire Pro Wrestling X

THE CHEAPEST OF CHEAP POPS

» RETROREVIVAL

» SNES » 1995 » HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT

It's always nice when someone brings you a gift back from a holiday, and one of my old housemates really spoiled me some months back by bringing me an octet of Super Famicom cartridges. The big highlights were *Final Fantasy IV*, *V* and *VI*, which I aspire to be able to read in the future, while the rest were mostly typical bargain-bin games like a pachinko game and the horse racing-sim *Winning Post*. However, nestled in there was a real diamond – *Super Fire Pro Wrestling X*.

This being the sixth SNES entry in the series, it's just about as refined as 16-bit grappling gets. If you've played other wrestling games of the era, you'd expect this to involve a lot of button-bashing. However, the *Fire Pro* games require attacks to be precisely timed when a grapple is initiated, and you need to employ a logical progression from weak moves to stronger moves as a match proceeds. While *Super Fire Pro Wrestling X* doesn't have officially licensed wrestlers, there are dozens of bruising brawlers to choose from and it's not hard to work out who the likes of The Undead Tailor and Axe Duggan are meant to be. If you're still not satisfied with them, you can create up to 16 wrestlers of your own.

Now, fans know that *Super Fire Pro Wrestling X Premium* was released a few months later and features additional characters, moves and custom wrestler slots. But while that version is undeniably better, this one is no slouch and a heck of a lot cheaper – the price sticker on my cartridge says ¥50, which is about 25p. You're unlikely to find it for the price of a Freddo unless you're lucky enough to be hunting for classic games in Japan yourself, but given that our hobby has a reputation for being expensive, it's always good to know that great games are available at all prices.

HWA

THE MAKING OF STAR TREK 25TH ANNIVERSARY

SPACE MAY BE THE FINAL FRONTIER BUT STAR TREK ADVENTURE GAMES WERE PRETTY MUCH THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY IN THE EARLY NINETIES. AT LEAST UNTIL STAR TREK: 25TH ANNIVERSARY CAME ALONG – A GAME THAT DARED TO GO WHERE NO STAR TREK GAME HAD GONE BEFORE

WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** INTERPLAY
- **DEVELOPER:** INTERPLAY
- **PLATFORM:** PC, AMIGA
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

Interplay had been around since 1983, and by 1991 its portfolio was already quite impressive – but it didn't include a typical adventure game.

Company founder Brian Fargo wanted to make a point-and-click game in the style of Lucasfilm Games or Sierra, and he had always been a huge *Star Trek* fan. But he ran into a big problem. "I had been chasing Paramount for years to try and acquire the licence for *Star Trek*, me and most of the company had been major fans of the original series," he tells us. "Unfortunately, Paramount would never return my numerous calls and I had little clout. Then one day I got a call from Emil Heidkamp from Konami and he said that Paramount was all over him to try and get them to make a *Star Trek* game and if I was interested. We had gotten out of developing games for other companies, mostly, but I agreed to make Konami a NES game ONLY if we could have the PC rights. Emil agreed since they did not do PC, and Paramount was happy."

> "BLOWING UP THE ENTERPRISE WAS A NO NO"
> BRIAN FARGO

As the name suggests, the game was supposed to be released on the 25th anniversary of the TV series, around early September 1991. The simple NES action game made it – but the much more elaborate PC adventure did not. This was largely due to Interplay working so closely with Paramount. There were never any real problems, but of course there was always time-consuming haggling over details. For the most part, the developers had a lot of freedom in designing their game – but there were also limits, as Brian recalls. "On some levels we had freedom but on others we did not. Blowing up the Enterprise was a no no, they didn't want violence (despite all the fistfights Kirk had in the shows) and getting Shatner to agree to lines that he would have 'never said' was a challenge as we had to make it clear that these were the bad answers for the player to give. We did want to include the Gorn but we were waived away from that idea as Paramount thought they might be able to give them their own game series later. Also there was an Easter egg that someone threw in that Kirk's wig would jump off his head in a 1 in 15,000 chance, run around the room and jump back on his head. Thankfully it was caught and removed as Shatner would have never worked with us again."

Inevitably *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary* missed the party and was released in early 1992. According to Bruce Schlickbernd, the game's producer and co-designer, this was no problem, even if the game's name was no longer entirely correct. "It was still in honour of that 25th anniversary," Bruce

BRUCE SCHLICKBERND

» Bruce was *25th Anniversary*'s producer and co-designer. After leaving the games industry in 1998 he worked at NASA JPL and Lockheed Martin before retiring in 2018.

PUBLISHER HIGHLIGHTS

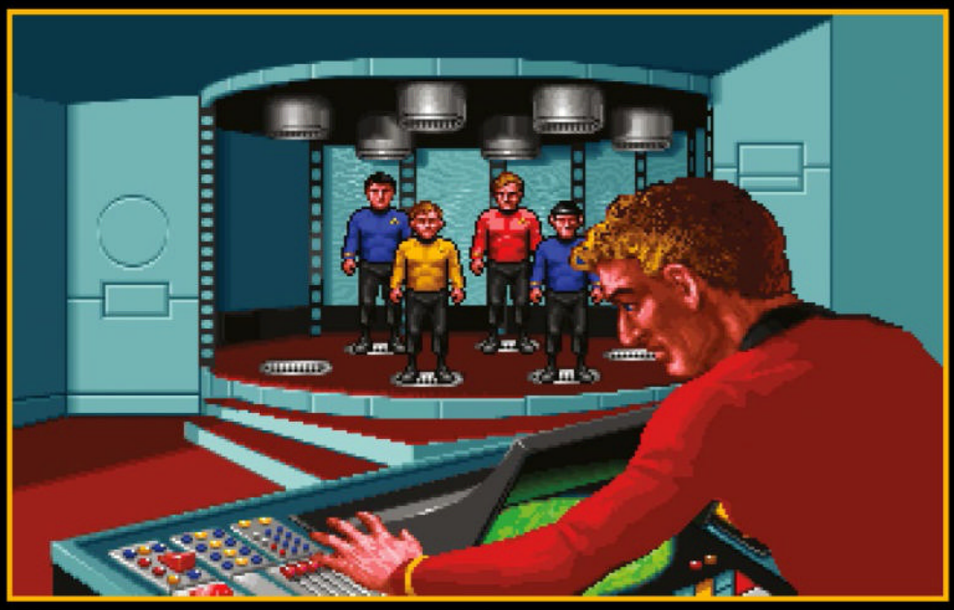
THE BARD'S TALE
PLATFORM: APPLE II, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1985

DESCENT (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PC, MAC, PLAYSTATION
RELEASED: 1994

BALDUR'S GATE
PLATFORM: PC, MAC
RELEASED: 1998

BRIAN FARGO

» Brian was the founder of Interplay and the executive producer of *25th Anniversary*. In 2002 he founded inXile Entertainment which he spearheads to this day.



» [PC] The landing party always consists of the same four people. No Mr Scott to beam them around, though – Lt Kyle is on the job.

points out. "Plus all the marketing material was already committed to that name. In any case, marketing rarely, if ever, listened to a word I had to say on naming games. The name *25th Anniversary* didn't do a thing for me at all, but marketing loves promotional tie-ins." The only sad thing was that Gene Roddenberry, the Great Bird Of The Galaxy, did not get to see the final result, as he died on 24 October 1991 – the game is dedicated to him in its credits.

25th Anniversary consists of seven chapters, all structured like classic TV episodes and self-contained. However, according to Bruce, this was not always the plan. "*25th Anniversary* was originally conceived of as being very open – you could go from one mission to another as the mood suited you, even in the middle of one," he explains. "That introduced a lot of problems, and Jay Patel (design/programming) thought it would be simpler and more true to *Star Trek* to have television-like self-contained episodes. I agreed with him and that's the direction it took."

Each episode begins with an opening credits sequence, after which you find yourself on the bridge of the Enterprise, where Starfleet comes a-knockin' with a new mission. Once you've explored strange new worlds, sought out new life and new civilisations, and dealt with Romulans, Klingons and the freshly invented Elasi pirates, an evaluation followed – and then it all starts over again in the next mission. This evaluation is based not only on whether you have completed the mission, but also on whether you have behaved like a real Starfleet captain: you can tend to the wounded and repair machinery – or not. You can stun attacking Klingons with your phaser – or disintegrate them. These decisions not only affect your mission score, but also give the game a lot of replay value, as each mission has different outcomes.

» [PC] The Golden Boy interface is a bit cumbersome to use but leaves the entire screen to the game.

Each character on the bridge has their own responsibilities: Captain Kirk gives orders, can save, load and request to beam down. Mr Spock is the holder of all information, while Dr Leonard 'Bones' McCoy not only has healing hands, but also a very dry sense of humour, which makes for some wonderfully snarky exchanges between him and Spock. These three form the away team in each mission, along with a mostly useless redshirt, with Kirk being the only one you control directly. There are four more people on the bridge: Uhura is in charge of communications, Scotty is repairing battle damage. Sulu makes sure you get where you want to go, protected by the Enterprise's shields, and Chekov is responsible for the well-aimed use of weapons.

According to the back of its box, *25th Anniversary* is a "3D Space Flight Simulator". You will know this right from the start, because the very first mission is a *Wing Commander*-style space battle, only with phasers and photon torpedoes. All of that sounds great and looks really ▶

LET'S TALK ABOUT TREKS

THE CAPTAIN SPEAKS TO ME!

■ Early in 1994, *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary* was released again. The shiny new CD-ROM technology had finally caught up with *Star Trek*, giving fans enough incentive to pony up once more, for two reasons: first, the final mission, Vengeance, was completely reworked. In the original release, this mission aboard the destroyed USS Republic consisted of just two rooms, a few lines of dialogue and the annoyingly difficult final space battle. Now the first part came significantly expanded, followed by the still impossibly difficult final space battle.

But much more important was the following, "Hear Captain Kirk shout familiar commands, Mr Spock coolly share his classic Vulcan wisdom, and much more… thanks to the voice-over talents of William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley, James Doohan, George Takei and Walter Koenig," as the back of the game box put it. Indeed, the full crew of the original Enterprise was put in front of a microphone to record their lines. With some slightly awkward moments, as Bruce remembers, "DeForest Kelley rolled his eyes when he had to say, 'He's dead, Jim.'"

Still, you will notice that the name Nichelle Nichols is missing in that list. The reason for this was probably money, as Brian recalls. "Typically, in these kinds of deals we have things called most favoured nations clauses and Nimoy and Shatner had to be paid the same. The next tier was everyone else and they also had the same clause for each other and perhaps Nichelle wanted more but we could not give all the other actors the same rate." They worked it out eventually, though, as her name and voice were added in later releases of the CD-ROM version, too.

TO BOLDLY GO EVEN FURTHER

HOW THE SEQUEL EXPANDED THE GAME

In November 1993, *25th Anniversary* welcomed its official sequel, *Star Trek: Judgment Rites*. At first glance, it looked like more of the same, as it played the same and sounded the same. Which is all true and well, but the real magic happened under the hood, first and foremost, you now had the choice of omitting the space combat missions by choosing the Federation Cadet difficulty level. The landing parties were more varied than before, Captain Kirk was accompanied not only by Bones and Mr Spock, but also by crewmates like Uhura and Chekov. The space battles looked much more fluid than before, the backgrounds were now mostly based on hand-painted and scanned-in images – and the text finally used both upper and lower case characters, making it much easier to read.

The most significant change, however, was that the eight missions now had a unifying storyline – with the Brassicans, an alien race created specifically for this game, testing the Enterprise crew without their knowledge. This culminates in a finale that takes place over the course of two missions with Hamlet-inspired names, Though This Be Madness… and …Yet There Is Method In It. All this and more makes *Judgment Rites* a grand and worthy sequel that in many ways surpasses its predecessor.

» [PC] Death comes quickly. Good thing you can (and should!) always save your game.

> "DEFOREST KELLEY ROLLED HIS EYES WHEN HE HAD TO SAY, 'HE'S DEAD, JIM'"
> BRIAN FARGO

nice. The only problem is that these sections feel completely out of place in the otherwise laid-back game – and the toughest fight of them all, against three really brutal enemies, is the game's big finale. Which, in hindsight, was a very bad decision, as Brian admits. "For *25th Anniversary* there was no other reason to have the tough battle sequences other than we designed it that way," he says. "However, we listened to the feedback and had them not be mandatory in the sequel." (For more on that, see the To Boldly Go Even Further panel.)

According to Bruce, the idea of making the space combat entirely in the style of an adventure game was tossed around for a while. "If you closely watch *Star Trek*, you come to realise that the Enterprise misses or hits in combat because the writer wanted that result. It was much more solve-the-puzzle and the crew got an instant success, which is in keeping with adventure games. While it was conceded as truer and easier to do, the presumption was that a lot of people would want to control the Enterprise fully in combat. Left to me, with complete artistic control, I would have skipped the combat simulator, and gone with the puzzle and cinematic visual reward."

The adventure part of *25th Anniversary* does feel familiar to fans of the genre: you examine things, have conversations and interact with objects. Unlike the competition, however, there's no verb menu and no on-screen inventory – that's where the Golden Boy comes in. That is the name of the interface, represented by a golden torso, which is accessed by pressing the right mouse button – a click on the mouth stands for 'speak', one on the eyes for 'see', one on the hand for 'use'. According to Brian, this system was born out of his personal dislike of the typical verb list, "I found verb interfaces dull and wanted to take a more visual approach to the input, with more personality. We had lots of discussions on how to best represent the 'use' option and I would frequently joke that we should just give them a sheep to click on. The funny thing

» [PC] Kirk usually has several answer choices in the dialogues that influence the following action as well as the mission rating.

HARRY MUDD
YOU'VE COME TO HELP ME, KIRK. YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME! I HAVE HAD A TERRIBLE MISUNDERSTANDING WITH THE KLASI PIRATE TRADERS. TRADERS! THEY'RE OUT TO

» [PC] The portrait of Harry Mudd had to be hidden in shadows for licensing reasons.

» [PC] You meet familiar faces like Klingons and Romulans but also new ones like the Elasi pirates.

was that Paramount threw a fit when it came to *Judgment Rites*, wondering who on earth approved having a naked person as the interface. Thankfully we prevailed." The developers even experimented with an extremely futuristic system as Bruce told us. "Jay Patel had worked on an experimental spoken command version to control the Enterprise. Nothing quite like shouting 'Fire phasers!' rather than pressing a button. Pressing buttons was for Sulu and Chekov, after all, not a captain."

All this and more led to top ratings when Interplay's game debuted. Gary Whitta, for example, had this to say in the April 1992 issue of *Advanced Computer Entertainment*, "I can safely say that I've never seen a licensed game that does such justice to its subject matter. Interplay's game isn't just based on *Star Trek*. It IS *Star Trek*, and I'm having a very hard time getting over just how authentic, atmospheric and enchanting it really is." In the 125th issue of *CVG*, Tim Boone sounds similarly enthusiastic, "All in all, [*25th Anniversary*] is one of the strongest PC titles ever and you'd have to be as boring as Spock to miss it." Finally, in *Computer Gaming World* issue 94, Allen Greenberg gives the following verdict, "This is the most outstanding *Star Trek* [game] yet produced for the computer." Unfortunately, according to Brian, there was no feedback from the actors themselves. "As far as I know, none of them played it. But Leonard Nimoy did have Rusty Buchert show him one of the games during a recording session. He was extremely interested in the medium and what it could do."

Today's verdict might be slightly less enthusiastic. As an adventure game, *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary* is average at best, and its hybrid design manages to alienate fans of both adventure and space action. But the most important thing, beaming the fascination of *Star Trek* onto the small screen, holds up remarkably well. The surreal alien worlds, the familiar bridge atmosphere, the strong emphasis on teamwork – all this and more added up to the first truly good *Star Trek* game, of which Brian has nothing but fond memories. "I've not played it in years but I was always proud of the writing and the appreciation of the praise it still gets. Our goal was to not just make a *Star Trek* game but to capture the essence of the show itself."

Bruce has a similar view. "I always figured that we were making digital sand castles, washed away in the rising tide of new computers. That somebody is asking me about them decades later amazes me. Last year, a young man at the Smithsonian Space And Flight Museum let me in without a reservation because he played the *Star Trek* games. Ahhhhh, 15 seconds of fame!" ✱

Many thanks to Rusty Buchert, Ken Allen and Jay Patel for additional information.

» [PC] The very last mission Vengeance differs greatly in the floppy and CD versions.

» [PC] *25th Anniversary* is full of strange and exotic locations.

» [PC] Everything can be scanned using the regular or the medical tricorder. McCoy heals and Spock comments.

» [PC] You can either stun or kill your enemies. What would a true Starfleet captain do?

» [PC] The game's puzzles can seem quite obtuse at times but there are many helpful hints to all of them – if you manage to find them.

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

RETRO COMPILATIONS

SINCE THE DAYS OF THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN, COMPILATIONS HAVE ALWAYS OFFERED GAMERS EXCELLENT VALUE FOR MONEY. WITH THAT IN MIND, WE LOOK AT SOME OF THE BEST RETRO COLLECTIONS YOU CAN CURRENTLY BUY TODAY

RARE REPLAY

■ While many compilations tend to focus on a certain era of a developer's career, *Rare Replay* is far more ambitious. It collects games from Rare's first three decades, beginning with the ZX Spectrum hits *Jetpac* and *Knight Lore* and concluding with Xbox 360 games like *Viva Piñata* and *Perfect Dark Zero*. It's also packed with excellent behind-the-scenes access (although it does require unlocking).

ATARI 50: THE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

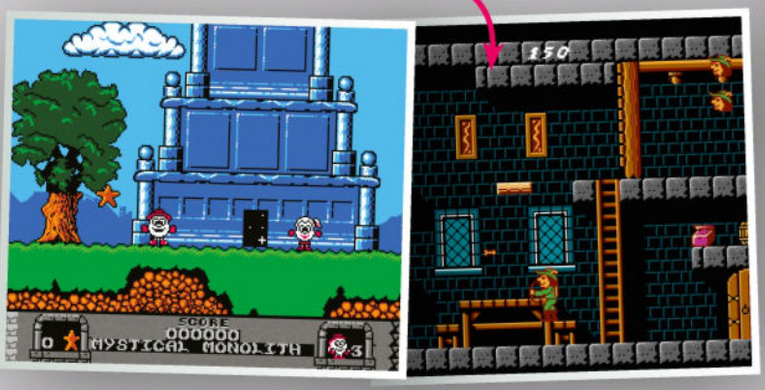
■ Digital Eclipse's celebration of Atari's first few decades is arguably one of the most important compilations of all time. Like *Rare Replay* it features games from a vast number of systems, but the historical elements are vastly improved. Interactive timelines are not only fascinating to explore, but offer additional context to the included games.

THE ORANGE BOX

■ Sadly, *The Orange Box* is currently only available on Steam, Xbox One and Xbox Series X (via backwards compatibility). Originally published physically by Electronic Arts, this is a stunning collection of some of Valve's greatest games. *Half-Life* might not be included, but *Portal*, *Half-Life 2* and its additional *Episodes* certainly make up for it.

THE OLIVER TWINS COLLECTION

■ There are plenty of Evercade collections that offer tremendous value for money, but this is one of our favourites. It's not only packed with some of the best *Dizzy* games, but also includes some of the more interesting NES games from the prolific brothers. Just be mindful that it's now out of print and is rapidly rising in price.

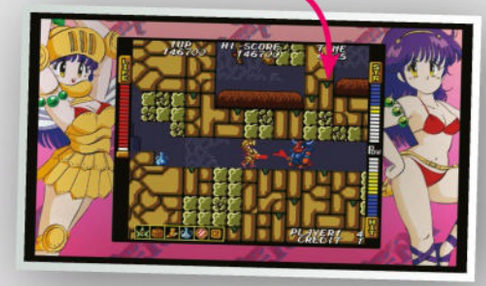


CAPCOM BEAT 'EM UP BUNDLE

■ While licensed greats like *The Punisher*, *Alien Vs Predator* and *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara* are missing, this is still a great deal for fans of the genre. All the included games offer online play, the emulation is spot on and there's a number of exclusives, including *Battle Circuit* and *Armored Warriors*. Just be aware that it only received a physical release in Japan (as *Capcom Belt Action Collection*).

SNK 40TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

■ You won't find any Neo Geo games on offer here, but you will find a selection of early arcade hits including *Prehistoric Isle In 1930*, *Fantasy*, *Athena* and *Ikari Warriors*. This being a Digital Eclipse joint, you'll find the emulation to be faultless, while excellent extras, including the studio's innovative Watch Mode, means there's plenty to discover beyond the included games.

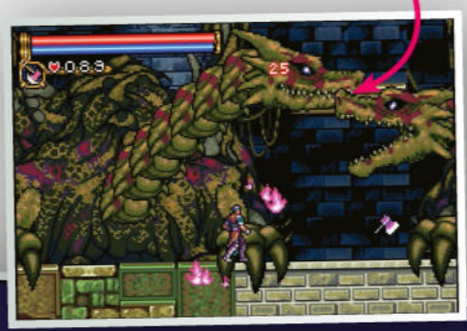


CAPCOM ARCADE STADIUM 1 & 2

■ These two digital collections are filled with great Capcom content. Sixty-four games are featured across the two compilations and cover nearly thirty years of Capcom's arcade heritage, meaning there's plenty of value here. Best of all are a number of challenge modes that allow you to compete with players from all over the world (providing the servers don't shut down any time soon). If only there was a physical release.

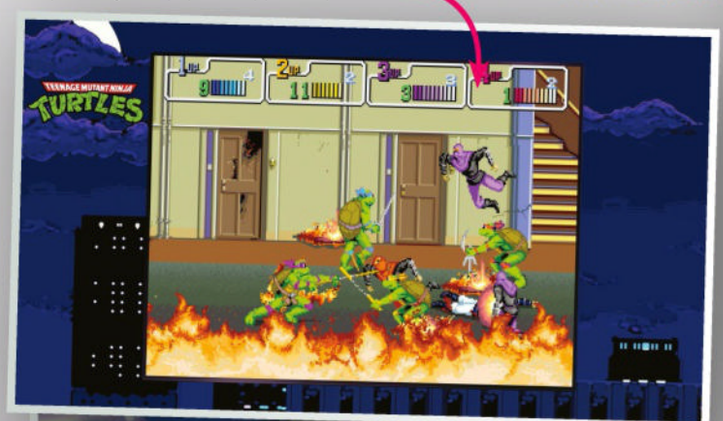
CASTLEVANIA ADVANCE COLLECTION

■ While only four games are included on M2's compilation this remains an essential collection. It contains all three GBA *Castlevania* games, as well as the SNES game *Castlevania: Dracula X*. While the emulation and extras are as good as you'd expect from M2, it's the cost that makes this collection so attractive. You'll be looking at over £700 for original copies of all four games, making the digital version an absolute bargain.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE COWABUNGA COLLECTION

■ Digital Eclipse is back with another carefully curated collection, this time focussing on the iconic Turtles. Thirteen classic games are included, along with lots of excellent extras, from stills from the popular cartoon to handy playing guides and online play. Frustratingly, Konami has already announced that it's being delisted in Japan, so grab a physical copy while you can.



CONTRA ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

■ Fans of Konami's long-running series have plenty to enjoy here. M2's ports are excellent, there's a variety of options to make them look great on modern TVs and (like M2's *Castlevania* and *Arcade Classics* collections) you can access English and Japanese versions of the included games. If you want a physical copy of this (and the other Konami collections) you'll need to look for the out-of-print releases by Limited Run Games.

THE STORY OF BROKEN

WITH THE ORIGINAL GAME REMASTERED, A SIXTH TITLE ON THE WAY AND THE POTENTIAL FOR MORE IN THE COMING YEARS, THE ADVENTURES OF BROKEN SWORD ARE NOT OVER YET. CHARLES CECIL LOOKS BACK OVER THE SERIES SO FAR AND HINTS AT WHAT'S TO COME

Words By David Crookes

Play the first *Broken Sword* game and, despite it being partly influenced by the book *The Holy Blood And The Holy Grail*, there's one thing you simply won't find. "The absolute nonsense of the Priory Of Sion," says series' creator Charles Cecil.

For while the book and the game make copious references to the Knights Templar – a military order of the Catholic faith which existed for a couple of decades during the Middle Ages – Charles draws the line at suggestions the group was created by a secret European society hellbent on championing the alleged bloodline of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

"My nemesis Dan Brown fell for it absolutely, hook, line and sinker," Charles smiles, referring to the author of *The Da Vinci Code*, a novel which presents the Priory Of Sion as fact, suggesting it was founded in France in 1099 CE. "Well, Dan, I'm terribly sorry to disappoint you but the Priory of Sion really doesn't and never did exist."

Although *Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars* didn't go as far as Dan's mystery thriller, it still presented gamers with a wonderful deep dive into ancient history and centuries of conspiracy. The game struck a chord thanks to its mix of interesting characters, sharp wit, eye-catching visuals and explosive storyline. Charles' inspiration also went far beyond a single book and the game was the culmination of many years of experience.

Prior to its release, Charles had worked on a series of text adventure games at Artic Computing from 1981, notably *Adventure B: Inca Curse*, *Adventure C: Ship Of Doom* and *Adventure D: Espionage Island*. He cofounded Revolution Software in 1990 with Tony Warriner, David Sykes and Noirin Carmody, and headed development of the point-and-click adventure *Lure Of The Temptress* published by Virgin Interactive Entertainment two years later. "When I designed *Lure Of The Temptress*, it was quite clearly text-based with graphics," Charles says. "You'd string together text commands, give them to Ratpouch and off he'd go and do stuff." The game used a system Tony called Virtual Theatre – the idea that the world would continue outside of the player's influence. This was also used for *Beneath A Steel Sky*, Revolution's second game, and for *Broken Sword*.

The latter point-and-click adventure was hugely ambitious from the start. Virgin Interactive said *Lure Of The Temptress* and *Beneath A Steel Sky* had sold well in Europe but not in the US. "So if we were to truly compete with Sierra and LucasArts we needed much higher production values," Charles says. Revolution needed to spend more money on graphics and animation and come up with a head-turning plot. "The idea for the Knights Templar came from our publisher at the time, Sean Brennan, who had read the novel *Foucault's Pendulum*," Charles adds. "We'd also read the absolutely crazy *The Holy Blood And The Holy Grail*."

> "I WANTED A PARISIAN CHARACTER AND I LOVED THE SELF-ASSURED CONFIDENCE THAT FRENCH WOMEN HAVE – AND STILL DO"
> **Charles Cecil**

Charles seized on the opportunity to primarily set the game in France, a country he dearly loves. "My mother took me to Paris when I was young, at a time when Britain was really grim," he says. "There was a palpable anger in the Seventies with the Winter Of Discontent, when everybody was on strike, and everything from the industrial era was sooty, dark and dank. Paris and France was so much richer, everything was clean, bright and breezy. There were smells and tastes and ▶

SWORD

» [PC] *Broken Sword* started with a bang – setting the scene for an adventure that has endured for 28 years.

» [PC] An early reference to a Neo-Templar who, it became apparent in the third game, lacked a sense of humour.

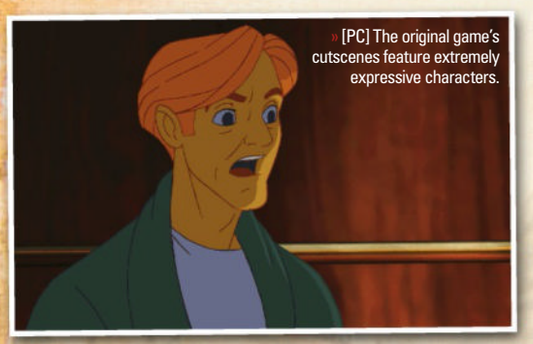
» [PC] It's bumbling French cop Sergeant Moue whose efforts to get to the bottom of crimes are more of a hindrance than a help.

» [PC] George and Nico have become one of gaming's most iconic pairings and they've starred in every *Broken Sword* game.

» The *Broken Sword* series has been a major part of Revolution Software founder Charles Cecil's life.

» [PC] George meets plenty of interesting characters as he carries out his quest.

> "THE COMPANY DIDN'T WANT US TO WRITE ADVENTURES ANYMORE. IT WANTED US TO WRITE GAMES LIKE CREATURE SHOCK"
> **Charles Cecil**



» [PC] The original game's cutscenes feature extremely expressive characters.

looks that were unfamiliar and very exciting so much of *Broken Sword* became about that idealised Paris I experienced."

As a consequence, one of gaming's most iconic characters, Nicole 'Nico' Collard, was born. "Nico actually came first," Charles says. "I wanted a Parisian character and I loved the self-assured confidence that French women have – and still do. In any entertainment medium, you also benefit enormously from having a second character because you can then convey the exposition so we had George Stobbart, a laid-back Californian, who came into existence as a foil to Nico both for affection and mocking."

For research, Charles and Noirin visited Paris' mazey catacombs – subterranean passageways filled with the bones of six million Parisians. "You have a room which is full of skulls, another full of leg bones – it's extraordinary. Then there's the sewer network. These elements found their way into *Broken Sword*."

Charles also amassed a talented team. "We were based in Hull and had Tony Warriner and David Sykes as programmers – Tony designing the engines and David primarily writing the tools. We had an animator called Stephen Oades who was extraordinarily talented. And we had Dave Cummins, my lead tester at Activision. I remember him writing a test report for a text adventure and his report was so much better written than the adventure itself. It was ludicrous.

"We brought together talent from the cartoon industry and approached Ballyfermot College Of Further Education in Dublin because we'd read a piece in *Edge* magazine which said it was training animators. The head of layout was a guy called Eoghan Cahill who looked at what we were doing and nodded sagely before asking us to look at what he was doing. I went to his office, he opened a drawer and he had a lot of artwork from when he was working at the Don Bluth studio and it was absolutely phenomenal. He was a master of perspective and instead of changing perspective through camera moves, he changed it through line art. He said, 'I think you should employ me.' And I agreed."

Together with Neil Breen, Eoghan established the look of *Broken Sword* – backgrounds drawn in pencil and coloured digitally in Photoshop. Mike Burgess, from the Red Rover animation studio, created the main characters and the introduction. "Then we had Barrington Pheloung who I'd played cricket with; a good friend," Charles continues, referring to the world-acclaimed composer behind the game's cinematic soundtrack. "We'd kind of lost touch but he'd started composing music for *Inspector Morse* and I called him. He was delighted to get involved."

As expected, *Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars* also had loads of puzzles (including the infamous Goat Puzzle considered to be one of the most difficult ever devised). "I approach puzzles, rightly or wrongly, by writing a short story and looking at the way they can support the story. I then write a bit more of the story and come back to the puzzles," Charles says. When developing *Broken Sword*, he was keen for logic to prevail. "Nobody can say they

Heroes & Villains

A LOOK AT MEMORABLE CHARACTERS FROM THE SERIES

George Stobbart

FIRST APPEARANCE

Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars

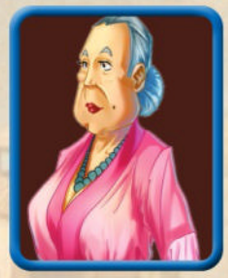
Aside from his characteristic dry wit and sense of adventure, George is driven by a desire to uncover truths and seek justice. As the main character throughout the *Broken Sword* series, he has numerous run-ins with the evil Neo-Templars – and his love rival André Lobineau.

Nico Collard

FIRST APPEARANCE

Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars

Nico is a smart, principled freelance photo-journalist who works for La Liberté and she works alongside George in the hope of unravelling a conspiracy and bagging a scoop (when she's not being kidnapped). Despite the attentions of André Lobineau, she dates George for a time.



Clarissa Piermont

FIRST APPEARANCE

Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars

Like Sergeant Moue, Lady Piermont also appears in the first and fifth games, with a mention in the second. Described as having "all the qualities of Bodicea, Elizabeth II and Margaret Thatcher rolled into one" ("It wasn't a pretty sight," George says), she's initially found at the Hotel Ubu.

Hector Laine

FIRST APPEARANCE

Broken Sword: The Smoking Mirror

An art critic who works at the Glease Gallery in Paris, Hector sticks in the mind as an ill-tempered, pompous oaf who is rude to George, causing him to seek revenge by slipping absinthe into his drink, causing him to smash an entire case.

Susarro

FIRST APPEARANCE

Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon

Susarro is a tall, creepy-looking fellow and there's a reason for that: residing in Prague, he's the head of a shadowy organisation called the Cult Of The Dragon which evolved from the Neo-Templars. He is hellbent on gaining immortality using the Earth's ley lines.

haven't played a LucasArts game and tried every combination on every combination and stumbled on the answer but I would like to think the logic we put in our games has meant *Broken Sword* has survived better," he explains.

***Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars* was a hit.** Its voice acting and strength of the characters were praised and the visuals stood out despite being 2D in a 3D-dominated videogame industry. "It sold very well and it was a huge hit on the PlayStation," Charles says, of the million-seller. "So we were astonished when Virgin turned around and said, 'Well, we don't want to commission another one.'"

In 1994, Virgin published Argonaut Software's shoot-em-up/first-person point-and-click sci-fi game *Creature Shock* which used full-motion video and spanned two discs. "The head of Virgin in the UK, Tim Chaney, called me into his office and told me *Creature Shock* was the future. He said the company didn't want us to write adventures anymore. It wanted us to write games like *Creature Shock*. Now, that was not something that particularly interested me but it was a real shock when they said they weren't going to fund a second *Broken Sword* and it just felt ludicrous. But the head of German marketing, a guy called Martin Spiess, intervened along with a number of other people and in the end, Virgin said, 'Yes, we will fund it, provided it is finished in a year.'"

Luckily, the tight deadline was largely met. "We'd already started quite a lot of work

» [PC] George visits a creepy curiosity shop to procure vital information.

Anna-Maria Presa

FIRST APPEARANCE

Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death

Fans of the series were shocked when they saw George with Anna-Maria Presa. Who could she be, the pondered, and where was Nico? George and Anna-Maria have a fling as the pair look to decode an old manuscript before the Martino Gang are able to get their grubby hands on it.

Roman Medovsky

FIRST APPEARANCE

Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars

There's certainly a familiar look to this ex-KGB Russian Oligarch who is so menacing, he tends to only go by his surname in the game. Protected by his gardener, Shears, at his London home, he owns the La Maledicció painting that is, it seems, worth killing for.

Reforging a classic

HOW BROKEN SWORD HAS BEEN MODERNISED

Although *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars* was updated and re-released for various formats as a *Director's Cut* between 2009 and 2013, Revolution Software has decided to revisit the title once more to bring it up-to-date for today's audiences. As such, it has dusted down the original 1996 version and got to work repainting the backgrounds in 4K from the original line art, adding dynamic shadows and lighting, redrawing the blocky character sprites so they are sharp and more expressive, refreshing the cutscenes and improving the audio.

At the same time, the developer has been mindful of remaining faithful to the debut game. "We've been careful not to change anything unless there is an inconsistency or an ugliness," says Charles. "But it's been an opportunity to address issues that have niggled me for 25 years." He cites the example of a scene in the alleyway shortly after the game begins when George Stobbart pulls at a drainpipe, discovers it won't bear his weight and concludes the clown could not have escaped over the rooftops. "You could see [without checking] that the pipe didn't go to the top of the screen so it would have been impossible for the clown to access the rooftops and escape that way," Charles says. "So in this instance, we made a change to the drainpipe so that it goes to the top." Some culturally insensitive changes have also been made. "We've slightly altered the face of the carpet seller in Syria," Charles adds. "Maybe the depiction was slightly old fashioned." Continuity errors have been addressed and a Story Mode that uses a hint system has been added, nudging players who become stuck. "We're trying to remove a sense of frustration," offers Charles.

Traditionalists will be happy too. "You can press a key to jump between the old and new graphics," Charles says. "But the funny thing is, when I showed off the reforged game then jumped back to see the differences, people were blown away. What they saw in the 4K version is what they remembered seeing in 1996."

» [PC] Having been trapped in a burning room with a poisonous spider for company, George's first task in the second game was to get out.

» [PC] Café Montfaucon is one of the key locations in the early games. Here George meets Nico's good friend (and George's love rival) André Lobineau.

Sixth sense

BROKEN SWORD FANS ARE ALREADY AWAITING THE NEXT INSTALMENT

As well as announcing the remastering of the original *Broken Sword*, Revolution Software revealed it was working on a sixth game in the series: *Broken Sword: Parzival's Stone*. Under development for PC, console and mobile, it will once again feature George Stobbart and Nico Collard, this time getting to the bottom of a conspiracy involving a mythical treasure said to have been lost for more than a thousand years.

Distinguishing the game from previous instalments is a "Super 2D" look which goes some way to simulating 3D using depth and layers. "We've been working with key layout people including Tori Davis who assisted in the development of *Broken Sword 5*," says Charles. "The idea has been to create a beautiful hand-drawn look that's actually applied to 3D polygons so that, as the screen moves, instead of moving in a way that is parallax, you get this sense of depth. We released a video showing it four months ago and the response was phenomenal. I mean, it just looks beautiful. I'm very proud of it."

When it will see the light of day, however, is unknown at this point. "Our ambition for *Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars Reforged* increased enormously early on so most of our team has been working on that," Charles says. The game was only announced to make life a little easier. "Our wonderful, passionate community always ask two questions, 'When are you going to redo *Broken Sword* and is there going to be a *Broken Sword 6*?' and I felt that it was probably a good idea to answer both at the same time to save our community manager having to go back and explain," Charles says.

But work has progressed. "I'm really proud of the visual look from a background perspective and what we'll be working on, when we go back to it, is the way that the characters could fit without looking too 3D," he adds. "But the story has been generally written and one of the lovely things about taking a bit of a back seat is actually to be able to look at it as a whole and look at the weaknesses, the strengths, when the puzzles work and when they don't. But I've got to be honest, it's going quite slowly at this stage."

so it took us in total more than 12 months but the vast majority of the game was finished in a year," Charles says. "That meant using the same engine and really using the same tools which was a terrific constraint because otherwise we probably would have been ambitious and rewritten this, that and the other. So *Broken Sword II* was based on the same engine with a few extra elements."

Broken Sword II: The Smoking Mirror explored an ancient Mayan cult – something Charles has said he was less interested in. Like the original, it hit the ground running: Nico was kidnapped while George had to find a way out of a burning room. As before, the two protagonists rubbed along well and, while the narrative was perhaps weaker and the game possessed less depth, it still stood up well. Yet following the publication of the game and sales of around a million, the appetite for 2D – at least among publishers – had diminished so much that developing a third, 2D adventure was pretty much off the table.

Sony's success with PlayStation played a part in this. "Publishers were saying the PC was dead as a gaming platform and that adventures were completely dead so they were telling us we needed to create 3D visceral games," Charles says. "The problem – and I think *Gabriel Knight 3: Blood Of The Sacred, Blood Of The Damned* fell into this in 1999 when they switched to rudimentary 3D – was that the whole point of adventure games is characterisation and subtleties. The low-polys of *Gabriel Knight 3* didn't reflect anything like the beauty being achieved in the first one but the publishers were determined that everything had to be in 3D and the only way that we would get commissions was by going down that road."

Released in 2003, *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* was therefore a 3D game, using a direct control interface rather than a point-and-click system. Revolution Software made the game more movie-like, drafting in Bob Keen as a consultant – he'd directed the *Jurassic Park* mockbuster *The Lost World* in 1998. By and large, the transition to 3D worked. Charles and Tony ensured the game was well-designed and driven by a compelling story taking in the delights of the Congo, Paris, Glastonbury and Prague. George was reunited with Nico and, the introduction of unpopular crate puzzles aside, the series' future looked bright.

"I'm pretty proud of *Broken Sword III*. I think it works pretty well," Charles says. "We built it using RenderWare – the beginning of the game engines that would eventually create Unity and Unreal. And what it did was provide a rendering solution which a company of our size, would never have been able to afford to write ourselves. We were then able to create lightmaps that

» [PC] George is something of a globetrotter which means the game has many varied locations including a jungle tree house.

» [PC] The process involved in distracting the dog at the Marseilles dockyard in the second game was a good example of *Broken Sword*'s clever puzzles.

> "We were effectively bankrupt at the end of Broken Sword IV"
> **Charles Cecil**

» [PC] George and Niko find themselves in another fine mess.

» [PlayStation 2] In-keeping with the trend at the time, the third *Broken Sword* game made the switch to 3D.

allowed us to break away from the RenderWare look that was so prevalent and, broadly, I think the game does look pretty beautiful."

One of the problems with *Broken Sword III* was Revolution's contract with publisher THQ. "It funded development but insisted on paying us in dollars," Charles said. Throughout development, the dollar's value plunged. "We had to borrow more than £200,000 from our local bank to fund the game. We didn't recoup the money but THQ probably made $5 million profit. Then, for *Broken Sword IV*, THQ came to us and said, 'Look, *Broken Sword III* was quite profitable, we'd love to do it again.' We agreed but only on different terms."

The series stuck with 3D for *Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death*. Released in 2006 for the PC only, it was designed by Revolution with development by Sumo Digital, thereby allowing the use of Sumo's Emmersion engine. Unlike the third game, the direct control interface was supplemented with point-and-click mechanics and the crate puzzles were reduced in number. A new character was introduced – Anna Maria – who became another love interest for George. She asked for help decoding an ancient manuscript, kick-starting another adventure.

"We foolishly started without a contract and then THQ reneged on our agreement and said it had to be on the same terms as for *Broken Sword III*," Charles laments. "We were so far into it at this stage that we had no choice. We were effectively bankrupt at the end of *Broken Sword IV* because we had this great big overdraft."

The financial issues had an effect. Charles has said that development was carried out under duress and the control system wasn't as good as it could have been. The puzzles were weaker and the ending felt rushed. "A lot of ▶

» [PlayStation 2] Oh great, a crate puzzle. You won't see many of these in *Sleeping Dragon*. Oh hang about…

» [PlayStation 2] There was more action in *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* with some jumping and climbing involved at times.

[PC] After its absence in the *Sleeping Dragon*, the point-and-click interface made a return in *Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death*.

» [PC] *The Angel Of Death* also introduced a new character, Anna-Maria, which made Nico a little jealous.

» [PC] *Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death* was built using an entirely new engine by Sumo Digital and the Virtual Actor System aimed to allow players to read emotions.

» [PC] *Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death* was only released on the PC. Charles Cecil would love to revisit it.

» [PC] In one of *Broken Sword 5*'s many minigames, George has to make himself look like Henri.

» [PC] Released in 2013, *Broken Sword 5: The Serpent's Curse* made a return to 2D.

» [PC] There has always been sexual tension between George and Nico, which Charles Cecil has said is fundamental to the games.

» [PC] It's a long way off according to Charles, but it's good to know a new *Broken Sword* game is in the works.

Let's Get Physical!

RED ART GAMES IS ON PHYSICAL RELEASE DUTIES

Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars Reforged smashed past Revolution Software's £50,000 goal on Kickstarter with backers enticed by three rewards, the most simple of which (the *Digital Collector's Edition*) saw them bag a reforge key, game code, soundtrack, documentary, dialogue script, comic book introduction, *Savage Warrior* booklet, digital posters and an in-game credit for £45.

But there have also been two physical options created in collaboration with Red Art Games, a French developer with lots of experience of game-based Kickstarters and physical releases. The most popular has been the *Collector's Edition Box* which also includes a George Stobbart figurine, a cloth manuscript, a USB-C key, a game manual and a physical copy of the game in a box for £100. For double the cost, fans have gained the *Ultimate Collector's Bundle* which added a *Broken Sword* artbook and the game's original soundtrack on vinyl.

"People had been saying that Kickstarter is so weak compared to ten years ago but the point is that in this current environment, publishers are not funding and it's hard to borrow money," Charles says. "We're just very lucky to have a community that is very passionate and I'm very proud of the way the Kickstarter has gone."

people say they love the game but there are just so many clunky edges," he confesses. "Whilst a lot of work went into the animation and graphics for *Broken Sword III*, the fourth game had a much smaller budget and, to be honest, it shows. It's a game I would love to go back to and offer a reinterpretation."

> "I RECKON I'VE GOT 20 MORE YEARS OF WRITING ADVENTURE GAMES IN ME"
> **Charles Cecil**

There was certainly no appetite to plunge in with a fifth game at that time. "I started to do freelance work," Charles says. Instead, a few years later *The Shadow Of The Templars* was remastered as the *Director's Cut* and released on the Wii and Nintendo DS courtesy of Ubisoft. It included new artwork, a hint system and a diary as well as a backstory for Nico.

"Then Apple approached us and said our games would work well on its platform and everything changed from that point," Charles adds. This led to *The Shadow Of The Templars* and *The Smoking Mirror* appearing on iOS devices. It was a chance for Revolution to revisit the series. "We could fund a prototype for *Broken Sword 5* going back to 2D and, on that basis, with a demo, we were able to run a Kickstarter and directly communicate with our audience."

***Broken Sword 5: The Serpent's Curse* was released in 2013, funded to the tune of $771,561.** It made use of the in-house Virtual Theatre 7 game engine and moved to HD, with Craig Gardiner overseeing the animation and the artists once again hand drawing the graphics and colouring them using Photoshop. "The engine was written by Tony and he certainly brought forward his knowledge from writing the engines for *Broken Sword I* and *II*," Charles says. "But the tool chain wasn't written by Dave Sykes – he was no longer with the company. Instead, we had Joost Peters who had joined us five years earlier, co-programming the two *Broken Sword* remakes. So *Broken Sword 5*, from a tool perspective was completely different but the engine was written by Tony. The game also had a lot of similarities to the early games and a lot of knowledge had been brought forward."

As a result, *Broken Sword 5* felt familiar and generally went down well among fans who were able to play the game on a wide range of platforms. The hint system allowed people to move forward if they became stuck and that let them work through a compelling plot that was split across two episodes and explored the secrets of the Gnostic Gospels. That said, the puzzles felt inconsistent at times in terms of their difficulty but it nevertheless satiated an appetite for more George and Nico adventures. "I need to take responsibility for the good, the bad, and the ugly, when it comes to the story and the puzzles," says Charles. "And broadly, I think *Broken Sword 5* works well – certainly it's well reviewed. I think in some ways, it's quite defensive. I think we could have innovated more. Maybe you know, this idea of nudging the player and closing down hotspots because *Broken Sword 5*, like all the *Broken Swords*, is too easy to get stuck. Sometimes players just don't know how to move forward."

Charles would like to revisit *Broken Sword 5*. "I'd love the opportunity to bring it up-to-date so that it just flows a little better," he says. That, however, is going to be a task tackled further down the line. Recently, Revolution has been remastering the original 1996 *Broken Sword* in 4K with new background art, AI tools and fresh features. The next step will be a brand-new adventure, *Broken Sword: Parzival's Stone*. But Charles is committed to the *Broken Sword* cause and he wants the series to continue. "I'm only 61 years old," he says, "and I reckon I've got 20 more years of writing adventure games in me. I suspect I can probably get three or four more games out before I finally start playing golf and I'm still driven by the enthusiasm, excitement and passion of our community. It's great to sell games, it's wonderful to make money and read positive reviews but the community is so important. *Broken Sword* has been played by generations – people who enjoyed the game with their parents and are now playing it with their children. It's incredibly moving."

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ARCADE WRATH OF THE MUTANTS

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** GAMEMILL ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** RAW THRILLS/ FACCRADLE GAMES
- **RELEASE:** APRIL 2024
- **SYSTEM:** PS4, PS5, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES X/S, SWITCH, PC
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

» [PC] Special attacks look like a great way of taking out marauding robots.

» [PC] Hey, an oversized eye – we can appreciate the stylistic intent here.

» [PC] Long-time fans won't be surprised to see Krang turn up for a boss battle.

» [PC] OK, who let Jeff Minter have a go at doing a *Turtles* level?

A NEW TURTLES BEAT-'EM-UP IS FINALLY HEADING HOME AFTER YEARS OF DELIGHTING ARCADE-GOERS – WE TALK TO EUGENE JARVIS AND MARC-ANDRÉ JUTRAS TO LEARN HOW THIS THROWBACK BRAWLER CAME TO BE, AND HOW IT'S BEEN EXPANDED FOR CONSOLES

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

If you've popped into a seaside arcade or a bowling alley in recent years, you'll know that the kinds of games that thrive these days are racers, lightgun shooters and giant versions of mobile games that have been adapted for ticket redemption. Finding a traditional game with joysticks and buttons is far from guaranteed – but if you do, it's likely to be *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* by Raw Thrills. So why try making a multiplayer beat-'em-up for a coin-op scene in which they're practically an endangered species?

"We're all *Turtles* heads from way back, and we love the original Konami arcade games," enthuses Eugene Jarvis, president of Raw Thrills and legendary designer of games like *Defender* and *Robotron: 2084*. "The other thing we were really excited about was the *Turtles* TV series that ran from 2012-2017. That was so well done – I know it was up for a number of Emmys, and the art style I thought was just incredible," he continues. "It had just been a long time since there was a cool *Turtles* arcade game. It was a passion project, and we just thought, 'Hey, this is a great game style.' You know how things get forgotten in all the 3D simulation hysteria – it's like, 'Let's have some classic joystick play.'

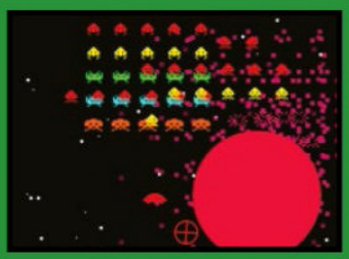
"*Turtles In Time* was the game we really loved, it just had that classic *Turtles* side-scrolling beat-'em-up gameplay," says Eugene, and the team's admiration for the game is clear as soon as you see the Turtles throwing enemies at the screen. Raw Thrills sought to have fun with bosses and additional power-ups, and also allowed players to choose the order of the stages. "I think in the arcade now it's more casual players and sometimes they have a favourite level, and they want to play that," says Eugene. "If you make them play three or four levels to get to that level, then it loses its appeal." Not every idea made it, though. "I wanted to, instead of side to side, at some point just to go into the screen. And I think the team at that point was pretty tired," he laughs.

The key goal was to preserve the fun of the local co-op experience. "You're in meatspace. You're with your buddies, screaming and

RAW POWER
A look at some of Raw Thrills' past hits

TARGET: TERROR
2004

This lightgun game marked Raw Thrills' arcade debut, and used digitised actors in a throwback to the likes of *Maximum Carnage* – but with a significantly greater range of animations. The game was ported to Wii in 2008, and made our list of the top 25 lightgun games in issue 235.

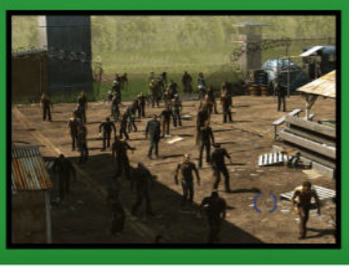


SPACE INVADERS FRENZY
2016

Produced primarily as a ticket redemption game, *Space Invaders Frenzy* reimagines Taito's classic shoot-'em-up as a manic lightgun blaster. This machine really stands out in arcades thanks to its large and colourful display, and unlike most sit-down lightgun games, it's not in an enclosed cabinet.

THE WALKING DEAD
2017

It was inevitable that a zombie-centric series of *The Walking Dead*'s popularity would get a lightgun adaptation, wasn't it? This follows a new group of survivors in the West Georgia Correctional Facility, and challenges you to escape the walkers while rescuing as many fellow survivors as possible.



CRUIS'N BLAST
2017

Raw Thrills has made plenty of arcade racers, but few of them have made the journey home. The globetrotting *Cruis'n Blast* was one of those few, and was greeted warmly when it arrived on the Switch thanks to an over-the-top arcade style that set it apart from other racers.

» [PC] Why not cause some devastation with a gigantic lightning strike?

» [PC] Loads of triangles, just like when Ted Lasso went to that American restaurant in Amsterdam.

» [PC] It's a haunted house type of thing, but we suspect real dangers lurk within.

yelling at each other, and kicking each other when they screw up," Eugene tells us. It seems to have paid off handsomely. "We have thousands of these out in the world, and we estimate, they're getting about a million plays every week," he continues. "The players have always been crazy for this game. Recently they sent us this petition, 100,000 signatures demanding that this game go to the home." However, other commitments prevented Raw Thrills from doing this itself.

Quebec City-based Cradle Games has now brought the game home in expanded form as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Wrath Of The Mutants*. "We've doubled the number of levels you have to complete before reaching Shredder, but also Shredder is no longer just a boss fight – it's a full level," says Marc-André Jutras, cofounder and CEO of Cradle Games, who explained that the process started from picking additional bosses and then levels were built around them. "Some seasons of that TV show went backward in time, into other dimensions and that kind of stuff," he adds. "We tried to stay close to what most of the fans will know about. We didn't go too crazy – Fish Face and Tiger Claw are very grounded in New York."

The original voice cast has recorded new dialogue for the game, as much for technical reasons as due to the expanded content. "One of the things that was sort of missing in the original game was the voice-over was very limited, in terms of like taunts and callbacks," Marc-André tells us. "Trying to fit the old lines of the original game with the new recording, you would have a clash in terms of quality, pitch or just the age of the actors, so we just re-recorded everything."

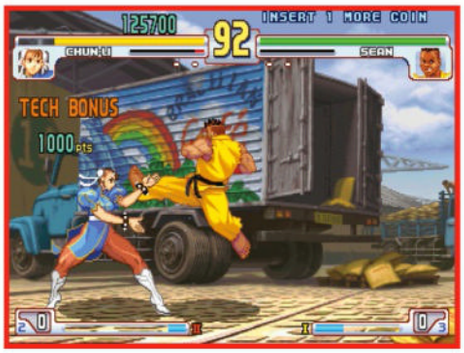
One thing that hasn't changed, however, is the focus on local multiplayer. "It's only local for now, we never know in the future," says Marc-André. "What we love to say is if your friend is over, the last thing you want to tell him is go back to your place so we can play together. All the games we've released so far had local co-op as the main feature." So if taking down the Foot Clan with a friend sounds good to you, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Wrath Of The Mutants* is now available on all current formats. ✱

THE IMPACT OF 3rd STRIKE STREET FIGHTER III

THEY SAY THIRD TIME'S A CHARM, ALTHOUGH STREET FIGHTER III DIDN'T IGNITE FIGHTING GAMES IN THE SAME WAY AS ITS PREDECESSOR UNTIL 3RD STRIKE. MEMBERS OF THE FIGHTING GAME COMMUNITY TELL US HOW THIS COMEBACK CEMENTED ITS PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF 2D FIGHTERS

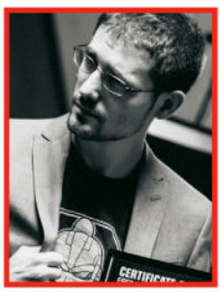
WORDS BY ALAN WEN

» [Arcade] Keeping up with contemporary trends, the bonus stage lets you smash up an SUV.



» [Arcade] *3rd Strike* refined the parrying that was introduced in *New Challengers*, which is just as popular outside of fighting games today.

» [Arcade] Gill can notoriously resurrect to full health if he's KO'd with a maxed out Super Meter.



ADAM HEART

» Co-creator of indie fighter *Divekick*, now lead designer at Iron Galaxy Studios who worked on *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike Online*.

JUSTIN WONG

» Professional fighting game player who holds the record of most Evo titles with nine tournament wins.

When Capcom released *Street Fighter II* in the arcades in the early Nineties, it revolutionised the fighting game genre forever. By the end of that decade however, the gaming landscape was looking very different. Arcades were on the decline as technological leaps in hardware meant you could essentially have arcade-quality experiences at home. 3D graphics also gave rise to 3D fighters like *Virtua Fighter*, *Tekken* and *Soulcalibur* (a trend Capcom admittedly also tried to capitalise on with spin-off *Street Fighter EX* with less success). Taking this into account, *Street Fighter III*, another sprites-based fighter didn't feel like the evolution of the series that many hoped for when it made its arcade debut in 1997. So how did its third iteration beat the odds becoming fondly remembered as one of the greatest 2D fighters of that generation?

The arcade scene may have been on the wane, but not long after the 1999 launch of *3rd Strike*, or to give its full title, *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike – Fight For The Future*, was also the birth of Shoryuken.com, named after the iconic *Street Fighter* special move. The success of *SFII* had been instrumental in creating a tournament scene where highly competitive communities were organising tournaments at their local arcades, but now there was a website that became a dedicated forum to the genre, where the fighting game community (referred to as the FGC going forward) was formed not just in the US but worldwide. To look back at *3rd Strike*'s legacy, we spoke to former editor-in-chief of Shoryuken Adam Heart, now a game designer at Iron Galaxy Studios, developer of *3rd Strike Online*, and veteran professional fighting game competitor Justin Wong, famously on the receiving end of the game's most iconic moment.

When *SFIII* first hit arcades, it was with Capcom's most advanced arcade system board CPS-3, which debuted with 1996's *Red Earth*. Utilising CD-ROM, it allowed for more sophisticated 2D graphics, with each character consisting of 700-1,200 individually drawn frames of animation. "It was beautiful, just a gorgeous-looking game," Adam says when recalling his earliest memory of seeing *New Generation* at his local arcade. "But then you get to the character select screen and you're like, Ryu and Ken's here, but where's everybody else?"

> "IT WAS JUST A GORGEOUS-LOOKING GAME, BUT THEN YOU GET TO THE CHARACTER SELECT SCREEN AND YOU'RE LIKE, RYU AND KEN'S HERE, BUT WHERE'S EVERYBODY ELSE?"
>
> **ADAM HEART**

Critics at the time may have felt 2D graphics were blasé compared to 3D polygons, but the bigger deal breaker was a largely unrecognisable roster, even compared to *Street Fighter Alpha*, a prequel released in between the two mainline instalments. "People had already invested a lot of time into becoming a player or a fan of a certain type of character, and if that character wasn't represented here, that was a tough sell for them," he continues. The newcomers would try to fill the void, so for instance

HEADING ONLINE

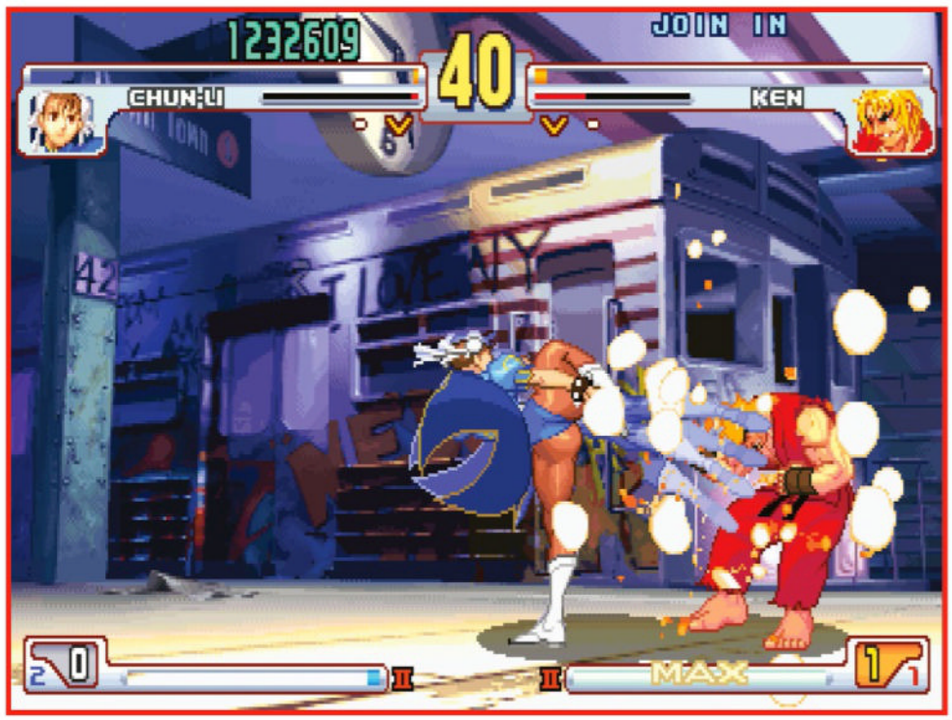
BRINGING 3RD STRIKE TO A NEW DIGITAL GENERATION

Although it had console ports at the time of release, with *Street Fighter IV* reigniting the FGC, it was the perfect time to reintroduce *3rd Strike* on PS3 and Xbox 360. Iron Galaxy Studios was tasked with porting the game over as a digital release via PSN and Xbox Live Arcade, which was shortly followed by *Marvel Vs Capcom Origins* and *Darkstalkers Resurrection*.

3rd Strike Online was Adam's first job at the studio, though work on the port had already begun with Ari 'fLoE' Weintraub, another prominent member of the FGC who sadly passed away in 2023. It was a tricky port as Capcom had provided the studio with PS2 code rather than the arcade. "The PS2 version runs a little bit faster, so we actually had to do some behind-the-scenes magic to slow it down a tiny bit to get it to match the arcade as closely as possible," Adam explains.

While still second to the electricity of playing in the same room, the online functionality was well regarded for using GGPO, middleware designed by Evo cofounder Tony Cannon to produce a near-lagless online fighting game experience through the use of rollback netcode. The already standout soundtrack also had a few new additions and remixes, though visuals enhancements were more of a mixed bag in retrospect, such as a 'widescreen' option that simply stretched the sprite work, as well as smoothing filters, though Adam reasons it was just a common feature for other retro releases back then.

The real significant additions with *3rd Strike Online* then came with adding achievements and tutorials, some which Adam says fLoE had been working on before he joined the team, including adding the Daigo parry as a challenge. Other changes were more subtle. "There was a lot of effort and design that went into the user experience: how do I get into each mode, because the arcade version just sat on the attract screen until you plopped in a quarter and hit start and then it went straight to single-player mode and if player two hit start it went straight to versus mode and then if you win you're stuck with the character you have and you're back in single-player mode," he explains. "Good UI and UX design is supposed to be pretty invisible, so if no one's complaining about it, you did a great job."



» [Arcade] A very approximate recreation of the set-up for Evo Moment #37, though Ken doesn't parry here.

Alex, also technically *SFIII*'s protagonist, replaced Zangief as the grappler, Dudley was another boxer like Balrog who only fought with his fists, while Necro had stretchy limbs like Dhalsim and an electrocution move like Blanka. "[But] it didn't feel the same. Their game plans are not even remotely similar."

> "3RD STRIKE TOOK A BOLD CHANGE OF DIRECTION AND REALLY EMBRACED THE SOUND OF THE STREETS"

That wasn't to say that 2D fighters weren't still popular. The mid-to-late Nineties saw Capcom collaborating with Marvel to bring its iconic characters to fighting games, with tag fighters like *X-Men Vs Street Fighter* and *Marvel Vs Capcom* being in vogue, later followed by *Capcom Vs SNK*. At the beginning of his fighting game career, Justin was actually more synonymously known for playing *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*, which he won the tournament at Battle By The Bay, the open fighting game event that would go onto become the most prestigious fighting game tournament in the world, the Evolution Championship Series, or Evo for short.

"Crossovers were just very in during that time," says Justin. "When you're growing up as a kid, you're watching *X-Men* and you see Magneto, Storm, that's something you're more hyped for. But [*SFIII*] didn't really have that. A lot of people didn't really care about these random new characters."

SFIII's fortunes didn't look especially rosy when Capcom decided to continue revising an older game on the CPS-2 board in between iterations, with *Street Fighter Alpha 3* releasing in 1998. Adam recalls that his arcade never even stocked *SFIII*'s first revision, *2nd Impact*, though this had admittedly arrived barely more than six months after *New Generation*. "I think my arcades were all struggling and they bought *Street Fighter III* machines that were, to my understanding, really expensive and they weren't making money," he explains. "A lot more people were playing *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter*. We even had *Ehrgeiz*!"

So what made *3rd Strike* different? Some critics might argue not that much. In a review of the 2000 Dreamcast port, *Edge* scored it 6/10, writing that "even the most devout aficionado would agree that little has changed between chapters" while other additions were written off as a "cosmetic distraction". Justin actually prefers *2nd Impact*, owing to there being more interesting secrets such as Shin Akuma or "busted combos" (*3rd Strike* rather controversially nerfed newcomer Sean), although new fighter Q does have a twist where he will only appear as a CPU opponent if the player meets very specific conditions, including not losing a single round before that fight.

One important appeasement was that, among its five additional characters, it marked the return of fan-favourite Chun-Li, who's largely considered the most powerful fighter in the game. Tellingly in promotional art, she's not only positioned front and centre amongst the roster but her face also adorns the Dreamcast's GD-ROM disc.

What's perhaps most outstanding about *3rd Strike* can be heard from the moment the game starts up. While *SFIII*'s music was composed by Hideki Okugawa for all three

entries, *3rd Strike* took a bold change of direction and really embraced the sound of the streets, channelling house, jazz, hip-hop and even a dash of James Bond. The Capcom Sound Team also collaborated with Canadian rapper Infinite, whose rap vocals can be heard in the stylish title intro and the character select screen. The soundtrack is not without its detractors, and there's arguably more iconic BGM themes in *SFII*, but *Beats In My Head* for Elena's stage, *You Blow My Mind* for Dudley's stage and *Jazzy NYC '99* for Ken and Alex's stage are tracks that could be blasted out on the dancefloor as much as the arcade.

Of the new mechanics introduced in *SFIII*, the most important one refined in *3rd Strike* was the ability to parry an attack by tapping forward just as an opponent's attack is about to connect (or tapping down to parry a crouching attack). Adam says that it was initially quite divisive as this allowed players to easily negate projectiles, disrupting the 'zoning' tactics in previous instalments, while Justin argues it was more of "a jank mechanic" when it was first introduced. Perhaps it was simply time adjusting to this new mechanic that meant players were more receptive to it once *3rd Strike* came along. But there was also more depth to it, such as being able to guard parry, performed by holding back to block the first hit of a multi-hit combo and then parrying, better known as red parry as the player turns red when this works. "*2nd Impact* and *New Generation* also had two air parries," Justin adds. "You can tap forward but then you fly all the way back, so there's no counterplay, so you have to tap down to get an air parry that you can punish with. *3rd Strike* kind of fixed that."

Of course, anticipating an opponent's attack comes with a lot of risk, especially compared to *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, released the same year as *3rd Strike*, which had a Just Defend mechanic that was more intuitively executed by inputting block at the perfect time. Back then, there was less incentive to guess parry, as the FGC refers to it, whereas you have time to

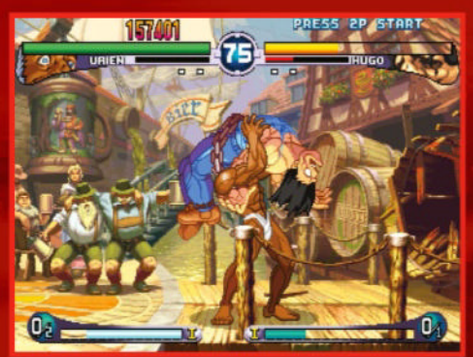
» [Arcade] Certain character match-ups trigger more build-up at the start of a fight, though Urien's applies to everyone

» [Arcade] Dudley's classy British boxer can also execute a pretty mean Shoryuken-style uppercut.

» [Arcade] One of Elena's Super Arts can regain her health, dealing more psychological damage to an opponent.

EVOLVING A FIGHTER

COMPARING 3RD STRIKE WITH SFIII'S EARLIER ITERATIONS



STREET FIGHTER III: NEW GENERATION

■ *New Generation* kicked things off in early 1997, dividing players over the very literal meaning of its title, with just Ryu and Ken as returning characters among the 12-fighter roster. The new mechanical fundamentals were established here, from the parry system and Super Arts to double-tapping the joystick to dash back or forward. What didn't carry over however was how its stages changed between rounds.

STREET FIGHTER III: 2ND IMPACT - GIANT ATTACK

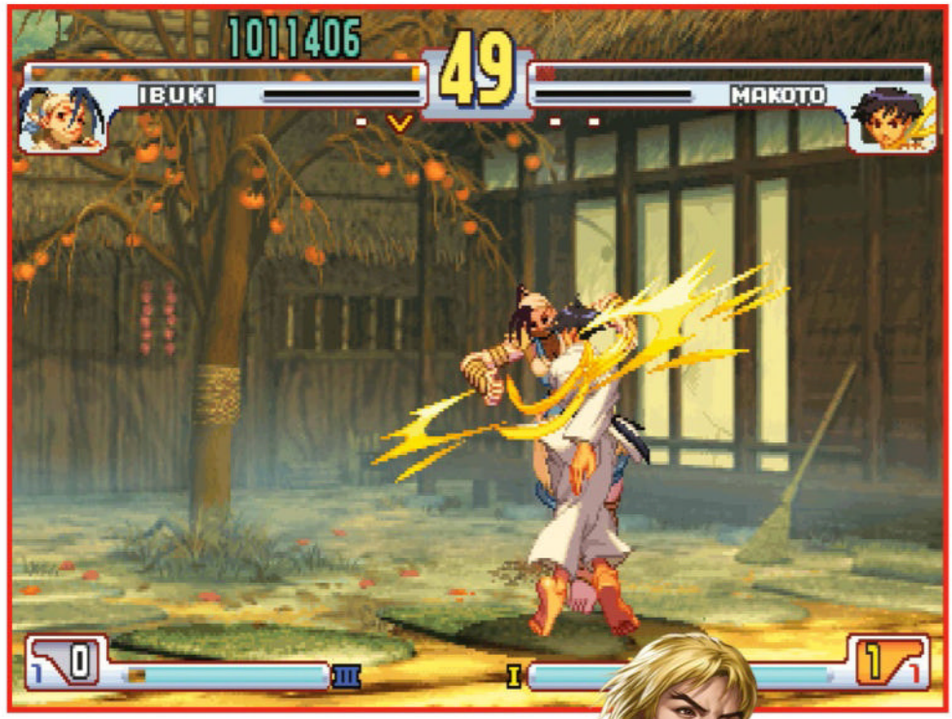
■ Arriving swiftly at the end of 1997, *2nd Impact* introduced two new characters, Hugo and Urien (the latter the penultimate fight before Gill), while Yun and Yang became separate fighters instead of palette swaps. Akuma was also available as a secret character, while Shin Akuma was a secret final boss. This game also introduced EX specials, performed by pressing two punches or kicks together with the move's input and using a portion of the Super Meter.

AN ECLECTIC CAST

THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL ROSTER OF 3RD STRIKE

The lack of returning characters may have turned off *SFIII* for many fans, although Chun-Li's return in *3rd Strike* was considered a high point for many. But even having the strongest woman in the world back for selection couldn't distract from an overall roster that leans on the side of eccentric. "Every game needs some weirdos, but most of your audience wants a really cool or sexy character," Adam explains. "One of the mistakes made in *SFIII* is that it was mostly weirdos." On the flip side you can also say it relied less on the kind of outrageous national stereotypes from *SFII*.

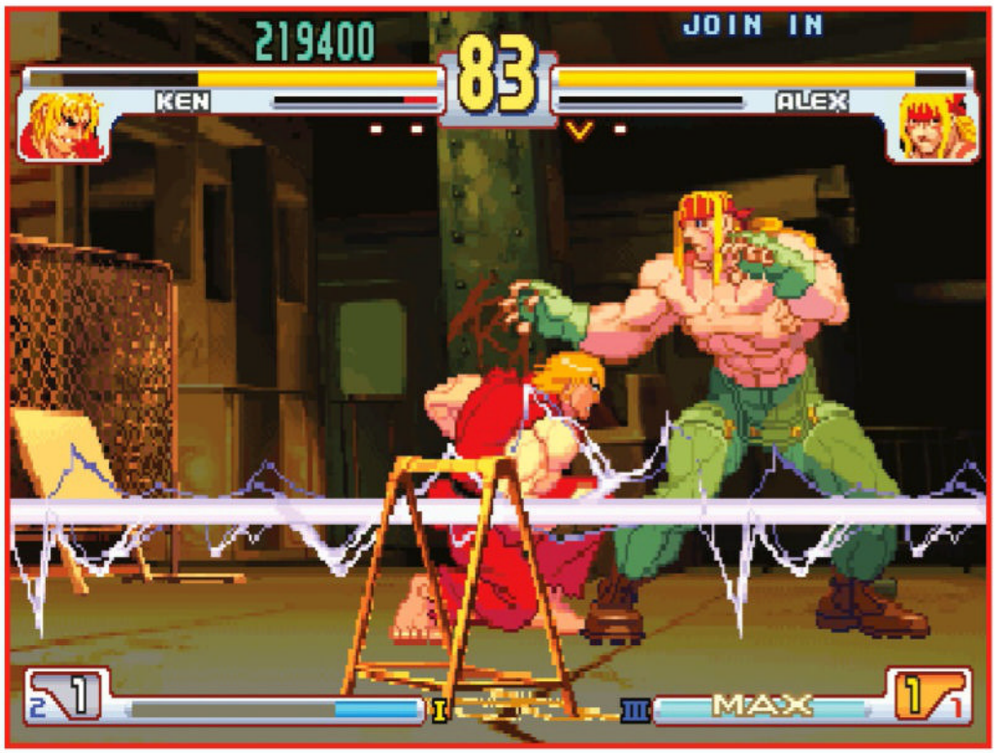
Nonetheless, it's a cast the community has come to embrace over time, especially as some did return in subsequent instalments, including Makoto, Dudley, Ibuki, and Elena in *SFIV*'s later iterations, even if the latter's Healing Ultra left a sour taste in some players' mouths. It's more surprising that none of its characters were part of the initial line-up in the newest instalment of the series, given that *SFIII* wasn't just the newest in the series' timeline but *Street Fighter 6* is also a chronological sequel. Justin however thinks it's just a matter of time, "There's no way they won't put *3rd Strike* characters in the game, it would be crazy if they didn't."



» [Arcade] While *SFIII* introduced tech throws, you can also risk whiffing as the grab window is very tight.

» [Arcade] *3rd Strike*'s intro, combining a hip-hop/house soundtrack with character sketches, simply oozed style.

» [Arcade] Players select between three Super Arts for their fighter, also displayed before the fight begins.



» [Arcade] Although Super Arts precede with a quick freeze flash, opponents rarely have time to react.

» [Arcade] Some attacks take the action off the ground, though more restrained compared to anime or tag fighters.

react to a fireball from the middle or the other side of the screen. Conversely, Adam regards *SFIII*'s parry as "extremely low commitment", compared to performing a parry pose, which leaves you more vulnerable compared to just walking forward for a couple frames.

This brings us to 2004, a year that Evo cofounder Tom Cannon once referred to as "the Dark Ages" for the FGC when the future of fighting games was looking bleak. Evo was nonetheless going strong, having by this point attracted international competitors including those from Japan. This was also the year where *3rd Strike*'s true potential would be unlocked in a match between Justin and Daigo Umehara.

The two competed against each other for the first time in the loser's final (Evo has a double-elimination rule whereby players can still compete after getting knocked out into the loser's bracket). In the final round, Justin's Chun-Li had a huge life lead against Daigo's Ken, having already used her powerful Houyoku-sen Super Art against him. According to Justin, the damage dealt by this SA meant it was often banned in local tournaments (each fighter has three possible SAs a player can choose when selecting their fighter). As Daigo did his best to fight back, he was down to just a pixel of vitality, meaning any attack would knock him out even if he blocked due to chip damage from any special attack. This was Justin's cue to unleash the SA once more for an easy win.

"People would make myths about how Chun Li's SA2 is unparryable," Justin explains. "So I, as a naive child, was like this was a sure guaranteed win. Winning with chip damage is very common in older fighting games, so that's what I thought to do against Daigo. Clearly, that did not go the way I wanted it to go." Having already eaten SA2 twice in this final round, Daigo knew what was coming, as he's seen tapping Ken forward a few times to preempt the first hit. And when the moment came, he miraculously parried all 17* of Chun-Li's kicks, with just a tenth of a second of a window for each, including the final one that required him to jump and air parry, before countering with Ken's Shippuu Jinrai Kyaku SA, all while the audience erupted in cheers, absolutely stunned by what they were witnessing. Daigo may go on to lose the grand finals to fellow countryman Kenji Obata, but he had already won the FGC's hearts, while videos of what's become known as Evo Moment #37 have been viewed millions of times.

> "THIS WAS A SURE GUARANTEED WIN... CLEARLY, THAT DID NOT GO THE WAY I WANTED IT TO GO"
> JUSTIN WONG

Perhaps more importantly, Justin believes this was a moment that revitalised the FGC. "A lot of people who were not interested in *3rd Strike* started to play it after that moment," he says, noting that the game took over from *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* as the headline closing tournament at Evo after that. "Even in our internal circle, everyone wanted to play *3rd Strike*. I wanted to play more, and started to take it more seriously." He did eventually get the Evo title in its final year in 2009, which he shared with Japanese competitor Issei Suzuki in a 2v2 tournament.

That Evo moment certainly unlocked new possibilities for *3rd Strike*, as nowadays you can find all kinds of videos showing the different ways to counter and punish Chun-Li's Hoyoukusen. But from a development standpoint, it had already run its course. *3rd Strike* was the penultimate release for CPS-3, which as Capcom's final proprietary arcade system board has just six releases to its name. While it received late ports to PlayStation 2 and Xbox coincidentally very shortly after Evo, which *CVG*'s review would also reference, it wouldn't be until *Street Fighter IV* in 2008 that the FGC genuinely expanded to a new generation of players, growing into the thriving scene it remains today.

Nonetheless, even without considering its highest level of play, there's no doubt that Capcom's game remains a beloved title, its beautifully detailed sprite animations a glorious final hurrah for the form that continue to hold up today, whereas the polygonal fighters of the same era don't hold up quite as well. The latest release in the series, *Street Fighter 6*, arguably captures a lot of *3rd Strike*'s spirit, not just with moving the series' timeline forward or raps during character selection but in reintroducing parrying. But by having all original eight World Warriors in its starting roster, you can also argue it has definitely learned its lesson of not alienating fans while embracing the new. Now, to celebrate its 25th anniversary (and the 20th anniversary of the iconic Daigo parry), *3rd Strike* is once more a main event at Evo, a sure sign that the game's still got plenty of fight left.

Hardware Heaven

PSP Go fact

■ Using a PSP Go legitimately today is a great hassle. Games must be purchased on a PS3 or Vita, and then downloaded on the PSP – assuming your router supports the old WPA security protocol.

PROCESSOR: 32-BIT MIPS R4000 CPU (UP TO 333 MHZ),

RAM: 64MB MAIN RAM, 4MB EDRAM (SPLIT BETWEEN GPU AND MEDIA ENGINE)

OPERATING SYSTEM: CUSTOM PSP SYSTEM SOFTWARE

GRAPHICS: 166 MHZ GPU (UP TO 33 MILLION FLAT SHADED POLYGONS PER SECOND, HARDWARE EFFECTS INCLUDE TEXTURE MAPPING, SHADOW, FOG, TRANSPARENCY, MOTION BLUR AND MORE)

STORAGE: 16GB BUILT-IN FLASH MEMORY (EXPANDABLE TO 32GB WITH M2 MEMORY CARD)

DISPLAY: 3.8 INCH 480X272 LCD SCREEN

NETWORKING: 802.11B WIFI, BLUETOOTH

BATTERY: 3-6 HOURS GAMING TIME

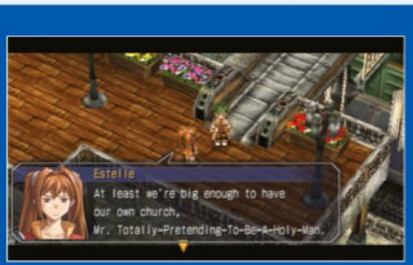
PSP Go

» **MANUFACTURER:** Sony » **YEAR:** 2009
» **COST:** £224.99 (launch), £75+ (today, boxed), £50+ (today, unboxed)

While Sony was no stranger to tinkering with its hardware, the PSP got a lot of attention over the years – the PSP Go was the fourth major iteration of the hardware, and the most radical redesign. The new sliding form factor that hid the system's controls beneath the screen was certainly striking, but far bolder was the decision to launch a digital-only system, with no UMD drive to support the hundreds of PSP games and films available. Owners of previous PSP models were unable to use their Memory Stick Pro Duo cards with the PSP Go, as well as any mini-USB peripherals such as the Go!Cam and the GPS receiver.

The experiment proved to be a flop. Price cuts started almost immediately and within just a few months, rumours of a relaunch were circulating. By the summer of 2010, Sony was offering a bundle of ten free games to new and recent buyers, and in April 2011 the system was discontinued outside of North America. Chastened, Sony didn't attempt another digital-only console variant until the PlayStation 5 launched in 2020. ✱

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS



ESSENTIAL GAME

The Legend Of Heroes: Trails In The Sky SC

You may as well play a digital-only game if you're playing on the PSP Go, and the English version of this RPG fits the bill. The Japanese release of the game was already enormous, coming on two UMDs, and translating it was a mammoth undertaking – the English script reportedly came out at 716,401 words, which is almost 130,000 more than in *War And Peace*. By the time it was ready in 2015, PSP hardware had already been discontinued and a physical release wasn't considered viable, so it was exclusively digital.

THE MAKING OF BURNOUT® 3 TAKEDOWN™

THIS IS THE REMARKABLE STORY OF HOW CRITERION'S DISASTROUS DEAL WITH EA TO REMAKE A CLASSIC SKATEBOARDING GAME SOMEHOW LED TO THE BRITISH STUDIO CREATING ONE OF THE BEST RACERS OF ALL TIME

WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **DEVELOPER:** CRITERION
- **PLATFORM:** PS2, XBOX
- **RELEASED:** 2004
- **GENRE:** RACING

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TRICKSTYLE
PLATFORM: DREAMCAST
RELEASED: 1999

BLACK
PLATFORM: PS2, XBOX
RELEASED: 2006

BURNOUT PARADISE (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PC, PS3, XBOX 360
RELEASED: 2008

***Burnout 3: Takedown* is one of the greatest sequels of all time.** The first two *Burnout* titles may have been well received, but the third entry is in a league all of its own, offering thrill-packed, adrenaline-fuelled races where even crashing out is a joy, thanks to the inspired Aftertouch mechanic (see the Improving The Formula panel). And bizarrely, it came about as a result of a doomed attempt to remake a 1987 skateboarding game.

Fiona Sperry, who was studio director at Criterion at the time, recalls that EA had asked whether the Guildford-based developer would be interested in rebooting its *Skate Or Die!* series, and the team leapt at the chance. It made a lot of sense. Skateboarding games were huge in the early Noughties thanks to the stratospheric success of the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* series, and Criterion had experience in the genre thanks to the 1999 Dreamcast hoverboarding title *TrickStyle* and its 2001 spiritual successor *AirBlade* for the PS2. The designer behind both of those games, Craig Sullivan was "big into skating" recalls Fiona "and it just felt like a good thing to do". Fiona says Criterion's game would have been very much in the vein of the *Tony Hawk's* titles "but it would have added getting off the board and walking around, and more adventure elements". However, around six months into development, problems began emerging. "They were putting more and more producers on it," recalls Fiona. "And gradually, over the months, it became apparent that we didn't have a huge amount of control." EA would hold regular 'franchise review meetings', where "everybody would generally get together in Redwood Shores in California, and you present your game for five to ten minutes, and then pretty much get ripped apart by the executive team", says Fiona. EA's UK-based producers would typically present Criterion's game at these meetings. "It became apparent quite quickly that every time they went to franchise review, they would come back going, 'Oh, we need to change the game,'" she says. "We looked back and thought, 'We haven't worked on the same concept for more than two months now, because every time we get to franchise review, they change it.'"

» Fiona Sperry worked at the book publisher McGraw-Hill before joining Criterion as a senior producer on *TrickStyle* in 1997. She was soon promoted to studio director, but after the acquisition of Criterion by EA in 2004, she took over the running of all of EA's development in the UK. She returned to frontline development at Criterion for *Burnout Paradise* and *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit*, but left to found Three Fields Entertainment with Alex Ward in 2014.

After around a year of this stop-start development, Fiona and design director Alex Ward decided enough was enough. They approached the Criterion company directors Mike King and Phil Rogers, and said they wanted to pull out of the EA contract. "And they went, 'You can't do that!'" recalls Fiona. "Phil was like, 'You can't, there's all this money in the contract, and you'll get royalties.' And I was like, 'That is all a mirage, it's never gonna happen, this game is never gonna come out, because literally they don't even know what the game should be.'"

> "IT'S NEVER GONNA HAPPEN, THIS GAME IS NEVER GONNA COME OUT, BECAUSE LITERALLY THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THE GAME SHOULD BE"
> **FIONA SPERRY**

The next step was to break the news to EA, which involved Alex and Fiona driving out to their offices in Chertsey in 2003. "And we said, 'We're pulling out,'" recalls Fiona. "I don't think anyone had ever done this before to EA. And Alex and I drove back to Guildford, which is obviously not that far, probably about a 30-minute drive, and we're like, 'What are we going to do now?' And we said, 'Well, I guess we'd better make *Burnout 3* then.'" At the time, a separate team within Criterion was working on the first-person shooter *Black*, but with the milestone payments from *Skate Or Die!* now gone, *Black* was put on hold so that the entire studio could focus on a sequel. "We were like, 'Well, we're gonna have to put all our eggs in one basket and work on *Burnout 3* and make that a success,'" says Fiona. The entire game was designed in just two days under the ethos of 'bigger, better and online', and the studio was fired up after escaping the constrictions of the EA contract. "We were a really good team, and we had something to prove," Fiona says. "I had great ambition for that studio at that time. And I was determined that we would be the best in the world."

Chris Roberts, who had joined Criterion as a designer in 1999, remembers being annoyed at how some reviewers had described *Burnout 2* as a good game to rent rather than buy, and took that as a challenge when making the sequel. "The whole attitude of the team was, 'Right, we're going to show them,'" he remembers thinking. "Try and rent this, you're not going to want to take this back, you're not going to finish it in a weekend, you're going to want to keep it."

» Chris Roberts worked as a designer on *Burnout 3* and *Burnout: Revenge*, then moved to EA to work on the *Harry Potter* games. He briefly returned to Criterion to work on the *Need For Speed* series, then joined Fiona Sperry at Three Fields, before becoming creative director at Stellar Entertainment, where he is currently working on an in-house AAA arcade racing title.

CRASH, BANG, WALLOP!

WHAT A VIDEO!

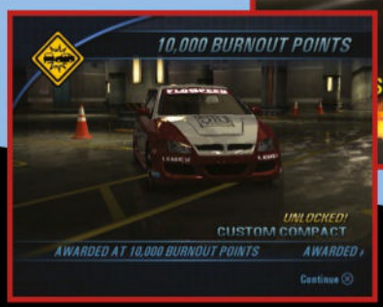
■ Chris Roberts made himself unpopular with the artists thanks to the greatly expanded Crash Mode in *Burnout 3*, the levels of which used discrete portions of the game's tracks. Usually, "Anything not on the track was pretty much like N64 graphics," he says, but sometimes he wanted the crashes to extend far off the race course, which meant diplomatically asking the artists to extend and remodel certain sections. "And they'd go, 'Aw, Chris!'" he says. "They must have hated me."

The sheer chaos of *Burnout 3*'s crashes, with multiple vehicles colliding and exploding, is something of a technical marvel, with Chris explaining that it was achieved by dropping the framerate from 60fps to 30 as soon as a crash occurred, freeing up processing power to handle the physics. During normal racing, the regular cars on the road are little more than boxes moving around, but as soon as a crash begins, they each have physics assigned to them.

Chris did a number of things to make the crashes more exciting. The brake lights of other cars come on, making it appear like they're trying to stop, but in actual fact they accelerate, and randomly pick to swerve either left or right. Cars are also deliberately fired into the air. "It's more interesting to see a car tumble," says Chris. "It's the Hollywood version of crashing."

» [PlayStation 2] Chris says that Criterion was like a big family back in the *Burnout 3* days.

» [PlayStation 2] Chris feels the *Burnout* series wouldn't have happened without Fiona. "She was the power behind it, she organised everything," he says.



» [PlayStation 2] There are lots of ways to keep your Boost Meter filled, and initiating near misses with rival vehicles is one of them.

We were young and dumb, and just full of ourselves. But we just went for it."

However, there remained the question of who would publish *Burnout 3*. Acclaim had published the first two games in the series, and although Criterion had an "emotional loyalty to them" says Fiona, it was clear that Acclaim was struggling; indeed, the firm would file for bankruptcy in 2004. She remembers that Criterion talked to a few publishers, including Codemasters, but then EA got back in touch. "Bruce McMillan, who was one of the top guys at EA in Canada, came to see us and said, 'How do we repair this relationship?'" recalls Fiona. "'Because if you want to be a great developer, you need to be able to work with EA, and if we want to be a great publisher, we need to be able to work with great developers like you.' Because at that point, we were like, 'There's no way in hell we're letting you anywhere near our game.'"

Despite this, EA persisted, and eventually an agreement was reached. Worried about a repeat of the *Skate Or Die!* disaster, Fiona crafted a carefully worded contract. "Pretty much every page, it says something like, 'For the avoidance of doubt, Criterion has complete creative control over this project,'" she says. "And they said, 'Well, we need to give you a producer.' And we were like, 'Yeah, well you can f**k off about that.'" But EA insisted, so they sent along Matt Webster, who had previously produced several Bullfrog titles. "Alex and I sat in a room with him, and we said, 'Well we don't really want a producer,'" remembers Fiona, "and he said, 'Yeah, I'm aware of that.' And Alex said, 'Well what would you do if I tell you to f**k off?' And he goes, 'Well, I guess I'll f**k off then.' And we went, 'OK, you're alright, you'll do.'"

Fiona says that Criterion remained wary of EA during the development of *Burnout 3*. "Every time we delivered a milestone to them, it would actually be about a month old so that we would feel like we were in control," she recalls. "We were so bitten by

IMPROVING THE FORMULA

FIVE OF THE MANY THINGS THAT BURNOUT 3 ADDED TO THE SERIES

TAKEDOWNS

The headline improvement in *Burnout 3* is Takedowns: causing a rival car to crash greatly extends your boost meter, as well as triggering a slow-motion cutscene. The game's Road Rage events centre around Takedowns, tasking you with eliminating as many other cars as possible.

AFTERTOUCH

Crashing your car triggers slow-motion Impact Time, where you can hold down the R1 button to slowly move your totalled car with the left stick. If you're lucky, you can shift it into the path of a rival car, and Aftertouch added a big layer of strategy to the game's signature Crash mode.

ONLINE MULTIPLAYER

Burnout 2 offered online leaderboards, but *Burnout 3* added full online multiplayer, with five different game modes. In addition to single races and Road Rage, there were three Crash modes: the co-operative Team Crash and the competitive Double Impact and Party Crash.

> "NEED FOR SPEED ALWAYS USED TO TURN UP WITH WONDERFUL-LOOKING DEMOS, WHEREAS WE WOULD TURN UP WITH SOMETHING LOOKING CRAP"
> **FIONA SPERRY**

the *Skate Or Die!* experience that we were determined to make sure we were in control of our own destiny."

By throwing its lot in with EA, Criterion also found itself with a stablemate rival in the form of EA's *Need For Speed* series. In fact, a demo disc for *Need For Speed Underground 2* would be bundled with *Burnout 3* at retail. "So it's like, 'Shit, we're going to be directly compared to that,'" Chris remembers thinking. Still, there were upsides. There was a chance to share expertise with EA Black Box in Canada, and Fiona remembers a great meeting with Hanno Lemke, who was in charge of the *Need For Speed* series for many years. Nevertheless, there was a "slight rivalry", she acknowledges. "*Need For Speed* always used to turn up to franchise review with wonderful-looking demos, whereas we would turn up with something looking a bit crap," she sighs.

One of the biggest changes in *Burnout 3* was the introduction of the Takedown mechanic, whereby forcing rivals to crash would extend your car's boost meter. Accompanying this was the Aftertouch mechanic, where following a crash you could move your spinning car in slow motion to try to take out other racers. Chris says Aftertouch came about from trying to think how to turn a crash from a negative into a positive. "It makes no logical sense, but we were just embracing the fact it was a videogame," he says. "Iain [Angus, the programmer] and I had played a lot of *Pro Evo Soccer*," he explains, "And it was like, what if we put aftertouch on the crash, like it's a ball?"

Getting the feel of Aftertouch just right took a bit of trial and error: in initial versions the car felt lighter and was easier to move, but this was changed to much heavier, slower movement so the player had to commit to moving in a specific direction. "You could never get back to where you started, that was kind of the rule," Chris says. It made for nail-biting crashes,

» [PlayStation 2] Causing a set number of vehicles to crash unlocks a Crashbreaker, letting you blow up your wrecked car for more carnage.

» [PlayStation 2] Gold medals and aggressive driving can unlock more than 60 new vehicles, ranging from compacts to supercars.

CRASH FM

Burnout 3 gained a radio station called Crash FM, hosted by Stryker, a real-life DJ. The station played a fantastic range of licensed songs from big-name bands such as Green Day, Franz Ferdinand, The Von Bondies, Ramones, Ash, The Futureheads, My Chemical Romance, and many more.

INSTANT BOOST

A small change with a big effect: in *Burnout 3*, players could use boost at any time, rather than only when the Boost Meter was totally full, as in the previous games. This tweak made for much more exciting races, as well as some almost unmanageably fast speeds.

» [PlayStation 2] In regards to the ill-fated *Skate Or Die!* deal with EA, Fiona thinks that Criterion wasn't suited to taking direction from outside. "We were very much an independent studio who had our own ideas, and weren't looking to be creatively led by another team," she says.

THE EA YEARS

HOW BEING BOUGHT BY EA CHANGED CRITERION

■ Right towards the end of *Burnout 3*'s development, Criterion was acquired by Electronic Arts. In many ways it was surprising, since Criterion had endured a fractious relationship with the publisher during the *Skate Or Die!* debacle, and had approached the publishing deal for *Burnout 3* warily. Partly, it can be explained by the motivations of Criterion's owner, Canon, says Fiona. "Canon, I think, were quite keen to not be in the videogame business, because it was a bit of an anomaly for them," she says. "Alex and I didn't want to sell: we were nervous that we would lose our independence."

The deal was also partly about buying RenderWare, Criterion's 3D game engine, which had been used in titles such as *Grand Theft Auto III*. The Criterion directors thought that RenderWare would become the de facto technology at EA, explains Fiona, "Which didn't happen for various reasons.

"We went from 65 people to 180 in six months after we were acquired, which I look back [on] with regret," continues Fiona. "It's very hard to maintain your culture." Immediately after the deal, Criterion spent a year working on *Burnout: Revenge* and *Black* simultaneously, which Fiona describes as "horrendous", and which necessitated working "seven days a week for about seven months". But she adds that *Burnout Paradise* was a particular highlight under EA, a company to which she would devote the next ten years.

"In hindsight, if I had my time again, I would have used the same fierceness I'd used throughout *Burnout 3* to protect my team once we were part of EA," she says, criticising the publisher's insistence on integration. "If you're going to buy a company, you should probably just let them get on and don't worry about the efficiencies of having one HR system, one finance system," she says. "Actually let them carry on being the creative people you bought them for."

» [PlayStation 2] Pinball was a big influence on *Burnout 3*, with Chris visiting the late Archer Maclean with Alex to buy a table for the office.

» [PlayStation 2] The presentation of *Burnout 3* is excellent. The huge map often gives you multiple events to tackle, just in case you find one that's too hard to manage.

» [PlayStation 2] Chris said the team wanted *Burnout 3* to adopt American sensibilities. "We wanted to be brash and loud, and sort of stand out," he recalls.

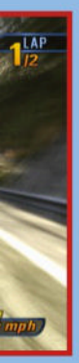
» [PlayStation 2] You get these lovely cutaways that show defeated cars as you rack up your many Takedowns.

» [PlayStation 2] You're currently in last place. You're going to have to keep that boost button jammed down if you want to make it into first.

as you strained against the joypad, willing your stricken car to move towards an overtaking opponent. "There's always that level of tension in *Burnout*," says Chris. "*Burnout* can feel quite exhausting at times, but in a good way."

Aftertouch also completely transformed *Burnout*'s signature Crash Mode (see the Crash, Bang, Wallop! panel), where the aim was to cause enormous pile ups, the success of which was measured in dollars' worth of damage. This mode was dramatically expanded for the third game, featuring 100 levels, up from 30 in *Burnout 2*, and was integrated into the main World Tour rather than being a separate mode. Chris remembers drawing out all of the crash junctions on paper alongside Criterion's creative manager (and former *Zzap!64* journalist) Paul Glancey, but testing them was a painstaking process, since moving any element necessitated waiting five minutes or so for the level to be rebuilt. He recalls working on the levels on Sundays, while spending the rest of the week on other parts of the game. "We used to call it Crash Mode Sundays," he says.

Fiona describes the development of *Burnout 3* as being like a military operation, with weekly meetings to review every aspect of the game. But the project remained ahead of its milestones all the way through, and she credits the director Alex Ward for running a tight ship. "He's very good at making decisions," she says. "The worst thing about working on a game is when you're redoing stuff that, if the decisions had been better in the first place, you wouldn't be redoing."



> "WE WERE CONSTANTLY PUSHING OURSELVES, SO I REMEMBER BEING ABSOLUTELY SPENT, LIKE JUST TOTALLY CREATIVELY, PHYSICALLY EXHAUSTED AT THE END"
> **CHRIS ROBERTS**

Chris remembers working flat out on *Burnout 3*. "We had a really hot summer as well, and no air conditioning, which was particularly hard," he says. "We were constantly pushing ourselves, so I remember being absolutely spent, like just totally creatively, physically exhausted at the end." Implementing online multiplayer for the first time was one of the many challenges that the team faced, but it helped that they were able to use an online system developed by EA Tiburon for the *Madden* series. And in fact the generous resources provided by EA were a huge boon, meaning the team could add things like licensed music and generally make a game that was far more polished than the Acclaim-published titles.

There was time for a little levity, too, in between all the hard work. Chris remembers that the team would have regular time-trial competitions, and the trophy was a VHS tape of the movie *DARYL* "The reason was there's a scene in *DARYL* where he goes around to his friend's house and they're playing *Pole Position*, and for movie reasons it goes super-fast when Daryl is playing it," he explains. The winner would be an honorary Daryl for the day. On the flipside, if you broke the game build, "You had a cardboard cutout of William Shatner by your desk, because you'd shat the build," Chris says. "Or you had the Sombrero Of Shame."

The development of *Burnout 3* took around 18 months, much longer than for the previous game, but the hard work paid off with the game's glowing reception on its release in September 2004. Chris remembers going out to buy *games™* to read the review. "And we got a ten," he recalls. "I think I slightly welled up. It was a moment of validation." It was a marked change from the reception to *Burnout 2*. "Nobody thought it was a rental," says Chris. "I think we put that one to bed."

Burnout 3 remains in the top 20 highest rated PS2 games on Metacritic, but for Fiona the months up to release were something of a blur amid the pressures of development. "I wish in hindsight that we'd taken a moment and stopped and appreciated it all, because we knew it was going well, we knew that it was going to be good. But sometimes you don't stop. And sometimes it feels like we just didn't have a chance, because we were acquired that summer by EA." That change would have big repercussions down the line (see The EA Years panel), and in many ways *Burnout 3* marked the end of an era. But what an ending it was. ✱

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Rapid Reload

THE WAITING GAME

» RETROREVIVAL

» PLAYSTATION » 1995 » MEDIA VISION

When the PlayStation first came out, it didn't really excite me like the Saturn did. Granted, there was no denying that early 3D games like *WipEout*, *Ridge Racer* and *Tekken* were incredibly impressive, but I was more interested in 2D games with jaw-dropping pixel art and they simply weren't pushed in Europe like they were in Japan.

When I finally did get a PlayStation in late-1997 it was *Rayman* and not *Fade To Black*, *Porsche Challenge* and *Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos* that got the most play and it was largely because of its gorgeous sprite work. But it was the incoming November release of *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* that had really fuelled my purchase, and one other game, Media Vision's *Rapid Reload*.

Described by the press as a supercharged *Gunstar Heroes* it sounded right up my street and I was always looking in local shops for a copy, but could never find one. When I finally managed to borrow a copy of a friend I was disappointed with the end result. Poor optimisation meant that *Rapid Reload* just wasn't that much fun to play. It didn't feel as slick or as snappy as *Gunstar Heroes* (I'd owned the Japanese release since launch), and that loan was enough to convince me to stay away from it.

When I started exploring the PlayStation library last year, *Gunner's Heaven* (as it's known in Japan) was one of the first games I sought out and while I got it below market value, it still wasn't cheap. It was so much better than the PAL release though. It might not be as challenging due to a lower difficulty and infinite continues (perhaps these elements were tweaked so it would last a PAL gamer longer?), but it feels so much better to play. Admittedly, it doesn't have the same wow factor to its visuals like *Rayman* and *Symphony Of The Night* do, but I still think it personally looks great and have had a lot of fun trying to 1CC it.

It may have taken me nearly 30 years to finally own my own copy of Media Vision's game, but it really is true when they say that good things come to those who wait.

RETRORATED

» Your mileage on the aesthetics may vary, but The 400 Mini at least looks authentic.

» It's time to put The 400 Mini through its paces – does this latest mini console do justice to Atari's 8-bit computer range? Over the page, we review C-Smash VRS, Berserk Boy, and find out how the home port of Raw Thrills' TMNT game fares

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Berserk Boy

I've had a lot of fun with this. It does suffer from some easy bosses and monotonous base fights, but the core mechanics are very solid indeed.

NICK

C-Smash VRS

I wanted to buy PlayStation VR 2 just to play this again after trying it last year. I'm rubbish at it, but I'm loving it all the same.

The 400 Mini

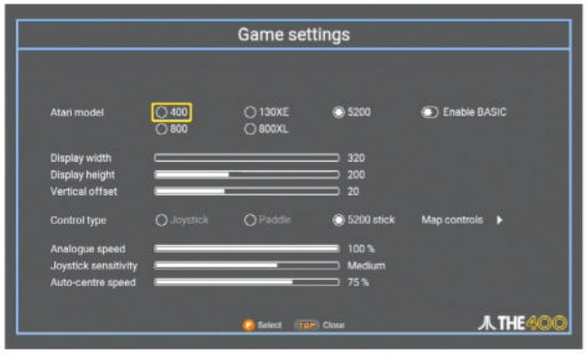
MORE FUN, LESS HASSLE?

INFORMATION

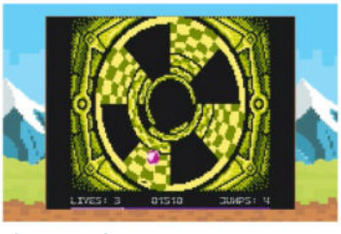
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £99.99
- **PUBLISHER:** PLAION/RETRO GAMES LTD
- **DEVELOPER:** RETRO GAMES LTD
- **BUY IT FROM:** AMAZON.CO.UK

When the mini-console movement started to pick up steam, there were plenty of systems we expected to go through the shrink ray – and if we're being completely honest, the Atari 400 wasn't one of them. The 400 Mini is fashioned after the Seventies computer and aims to support the entire family of Atari 8-bit computers as well as the much-maligned Atari 5200. The system comes via Retro Games Ltd, which has built up a reputation for solid plug-and-play machines thanks to its previous work on a series of Commodore-themed devices. First impressions of the physical product are good. The 400 Mini is a half-size recreation, and as with previous Retro Games machines it is faithful without much in the way of bells and whistles – for example, the cartridge lid is cosmetic only, and doesn't open. Four USB ports are provided for controllers on the front, with a fifth on the back for loading games. Also on the back are a standard sized HDMI port and a USB-C power port, and as is common today a power cable is supplied but you'll need your own plug adapter.

The bundled controller, The CXStick, is a customised USB version of the one-button Atari CX40 joystick. To assist with



» [The 400 Mini] If you find this settings screen daunting, maybe avoid trying to load Atari 5200 games.



» [The 400 Mini] *Yoomp!* is a more modern Atari 8-bit game, but it's a community favourite.

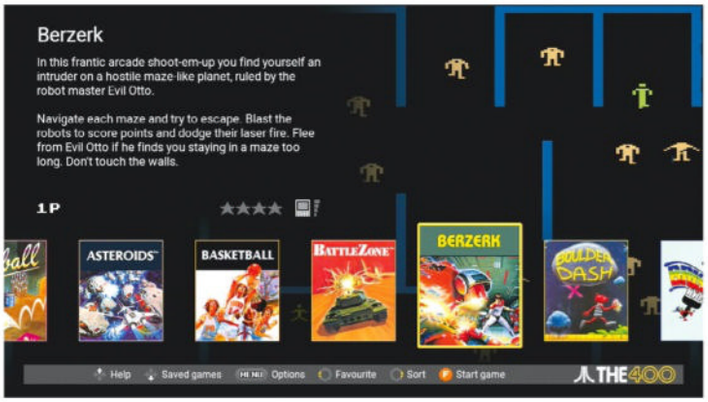
BRIEF HISTORY

» The 400 Mini is the latest plug-and-play console from Retro Games Ltd and Plaion, previously behind The A500 Mini, The C64 and The C64 Mini. This new machine is licensed by Atari and plays games intended for the Atari 8-bit range, including the 400/800, XL and XE computers as well as the Atari 5200 console. Unlike the recent Atari 2600+, it's a more traditional type of mini console with built-in games and no support for original peripherals or software.

menu navigation, the controller has four buttons hidden in the ring surrounding the joystick, two buttons on the front and a shoulder button. The system allows you to rotate the controller so the fire button is on the right, which is a nice thought but the cable does get in the way a bit. Additional controllers are available for £24.99 – we found that we were able to use other controllers, both wired and wireless with USB dongles, but don't assume compatibility.

As with previous Retro Games machines, the menu is straightforward and attractive, with a variety of options for sorting games and the ability to set your favourites. The system supports both 50Hz and 60Hz output at 720p, 4:3 or pixel-perfect screen ratio options and a variety of screen borders. A CRT filter is available but it's not tremendously impressive by modern standards, with no customisation available. Each game supports four save states and you can rewind up to 40 seconds of gameplay, but this is a bit fiddly – it requires you to press both the Home button and left on the joystick. A virtual keyboard is available if needed, and USB keyboards are supported.

Twenty-five games are built in, and there are plenty of classics to be found – *Missile Command*, *Berzerk*, *Miner 2049er*, *Battlezone*, *Centipede*, *Boulder Dash* and *Lee* (the licensing-friendly version of *Bruce Lee*) all stand out as recognisable highlights. Homebrew favourite *Yoomp!* and *Capture The Flag* do a great job of showing off just how powerful Atari's hardware really was, and less celebrated games like *O'Riley's Mine* are worth your time too. Not everything is a hit – *Basketball* stands out here – but the game selection does a good job of introducing players to the hardware, and of course you can add your own games via USB to cover the gaps.


Berzerk
In this frantic arcade shoot-em-up you find yourself an intruder on a hostile maze-like planet, ruled by the robot master Evil Otto.
Navigate each maze and try to escape. Blast the robots to score points and dodge their laser fire. Flee from Evil Otto if he finds you staying in a maze too long. Don't touch the walls.
1P
ASTEROIDS
BASKETBALL
BATTLEZONE
BERZERK
BOULDER DASH
Help
Saved games
Options
Favourite
Sort
Start game
THE400

» [The 400 Mini] As expected, the system menu is simple, even if the controls need getting used to.

The only problem with the USB support is that it's not exactly straightforward. For a start, the first two memory sticks we used seemed to be formatted correctly, but weren't recognised. Things started working once we switched to one we'd previously used with The A500 Mini, but then we discovered that running games requires some configuration – as well as selecting your hardware model, you need to set up your controller. The included controller isn't really suitable for Atari 5200 games though, and we'd have liked to have seen an official solution for this. Of course, there's also the issue of obtaining properly functioning game files to contend with. We're still glad this feature was included, but you should be aware that it doesn't offer the immediacy of the main experience.

All in all, The 400 Mini does suffer a little from some of its ambitions. The measures taken to keep the joystick looking authentic are clever, and you'll probably get used to them with regular use, but they do make the menus a bit less intuitive to use than with previous Retro Games machines when you're starting out. Likewise, the inclusion of Atari 5200 support is commendable as the system likely doesn't justify its own nostalgia release, but you'll need to fiddle with the options a fair bit to find control settings that suit you. Is it still a worthwhile machine? We'd say so – though it doesn't quite simplify things to the level that The A500 Mini did, it does provide a good starting point for anyone interested in trying out the Atari 8-bit range. ✱

✱ HIDDEN GEMS

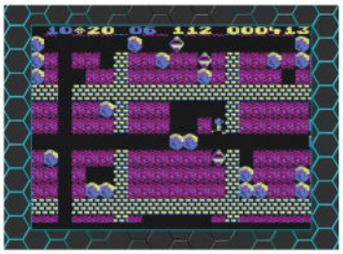
▼ HOW TO UNLOCK GAMES WITH A COMPATIBLE CONTROLLER

Games that use paddle controllers are supported, so long as you have an appropriate controller to plug in – Atari noted its Wireless Classic Joystick will work via USB. If you do plug in a compatible controller, two hidden games are unlocked. *Super Breakout* is a version of the brick-breaking arcade hit, while *Castle Crisis* is essentially *Warlords* in all but name, which should justify the effort to find a few compatible controllers for a multiplayer session.

In a nutshell

The 400 Mini is a nice machine that does a lot of things right for anyone curious about revisiting Atari's 8-bit computers. Just be aware that tinkering with settings is a necessity once you venture beyond the built-in games.

» [The 400 Mini] *Capture The Flag* is an impressively smooth first-person two-player maze game.



» [The 400 Mini] *Boulder Dash* is one of our favourites, and plays well on the system.

» [The 400 Mini] It's possible to load your own games via USB, but the process can be surprisingly fiddly.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Pocket Adaptor Set

» **System:** Analogue Pocket » **Buy it for:** $99 » **Buy it from:** analogue.co

We've waited a long time for these adaptors as they were first announced alongside the Analogue Pocket in 2021. Created to support compatibility with the Neo Geo Pocket Color, PC Engine and Atari Lynx, have they been worth the wait?

The Pocket adaptors are obviously for those who want to play their original carts on Analogue's handheld and in this respect they work very well (although those who are interested in OpenFPGA will have already been enjoying Neo Geo Pocket Color and PC Engine games on the system already). You'll need to have the latest update installed to take advantage of these new adaptors but they work in exactly the same way as the already-released Game Gear adaptor – simply connect the adaptor to the Pocket, pop in a game and you're ready to play.

Upon pressing play you'll be shown a screen highlighting the system, developer, publisher, region and image (if you've decided to add one). A second button press boots the game. As you'd expect from Analogue the emulation is faultless for all three systems and the Pocket's incredible screen means they all look amazing as well. You can change the sharpness, desaturation and size/position of all systems, while the Lynx also offers (admittedly pointless) rotate modes.

As great as these new adaptors are, they won't necessarily be for everyone. As with the original Game Gear adaptor these new ones don't sit flush with the Pocket and if it's knocked during play it can cause the game to crash. The Lynx and PC Engine cards also protrude rather awkwardly making them easier to knock, while it's very hard to tell all three adaptors apart. Another issue that may affect some is that Analogue is only currently supplying these in sets of three for $99. Those with sizeable cart collections will find these essential, but the long wait may have dulled anticipation for these neat devices.

» Neo Geo Pocket Color games look neat with very little of the cart on show during play.

» While all of the adaptors are numbered it can be very hard to make out which is which.

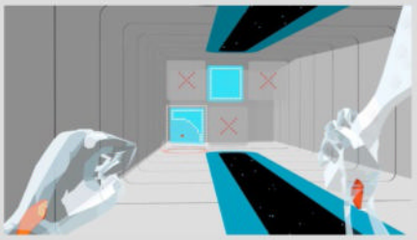
Berserk Boy

» **System:** Switch (tested), PC » **Buy it for:** £15.99
» **Buy it from:** Online

If you're looking for a *Mega Man*-style adventure you'll certainly enjoy *Berserk Boy*. While it's much more linear than Capcom's series, it shares many similarities, with the most noticeable being its boss battles – once a boss is defeated you gain its suit and can switch between suits on the fly as you play. *Berserk Boy* has plenty of replay value too as areas of the game are inaccessible until you've acquired certain suits, and you'll also need 50 medals to fully complete the game. Disappointingly, the boss fights offer little challenge and there are annoying battles that take place in your base after each boss fight that add little to the adventure. Despite these niggles, *Berserk Boy* remains a lot of fun.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **78%**



C-Smash VRS

» **System:** Meta Quest 2 (version tested), Quest 3, Pico 4, PS5
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £14.99

The 'squash meets *Breakout*' action of *Cosmic Smash* earned a cult following on the Dreamcast, but this VR reimagining deserves to reach a far wider audience. It's a little tricky to get used to moving with the analogue stick, but once you do the action is highly responsive and you'll work up a nice sweat. Chasing fast times and high scores can become compulsive, and a few different multiplayer variants add to the longevity. The flat-shaded look and excellent electronic music from Ken Ishii and Danalogue make for a stylish game, too. It's one of our favourite retro VR adaptations so far.

NICK THORPE

» Score **84%**

TMNT Arcade: Wrath Of The Mutants

» **System:** Switch (version tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, PC
» **Buy it for:** £24.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

If you've ever played Konami's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* beat-'em-ups, you'll be right at home with this four-player brawler – it's a loving tribute that sticks to the classic formula fairly closely. The home version has been enhanced over the 2017 arcade original with new stages and bosses, extending the run time to about 90 minutes on Normal mode, which means that it fits nicely into a local multiplayer evening. However, the Turtles all fight similarly so there's not a lot of variety to sustain repeat play. It's good knockabout fun, but *Shredder's Revenge* is out there too.

NICK THORPE

» Score **70%**

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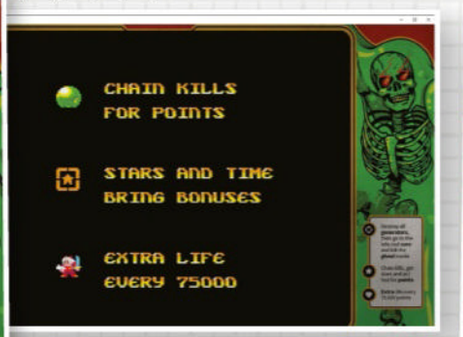
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

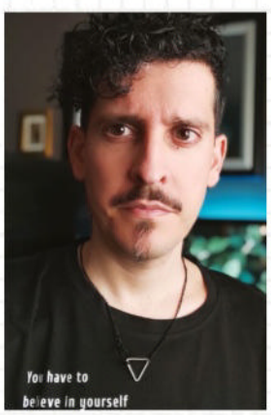
<!--- [PC] LATER LEVELS OF TOXIC TOMB INTRODUCE NEW ENEMIES, SUCH AS THIS GIANT EYEBALL BOSS. --->



<!--- [PC] HELPFUL HINTS APPEAR BEFORE STARTING A GAME. --->

<!--- [PC] ADDING UP THE BONUS POINTS AFTER COMPLETING A LEVEL OF TOXIC TOMB. --->

<INTRO> LOOKING BACK WE CAN TRACE PROGRESS FOR CERTAIN TITLES. SAM'S JOURNEY FOR NES (RG 230) IS NOW ON SALE, GRIDLOCK (RG 254) IS AVAILABLE DIGITALLY AND PHYSICALLY (VIA MEGASTYLE.ITCH.IO AND BITMAPSOFT.CO.UK RESPECTIVELY), THE STORIED SWORD (RG 247) REACHED KICKSTARTER, AND TOXIC TOMB WAS RECENTLY REVIEWED (RG 257) – NOW WE TALK TO DEVELOPER LOCOMALITO. MEGA DRIVE SHOOT-'EM-UP FANS CAN LOOK FORWARD TO LUFTHOHEIT AND TURRICAN WILL SOON BE SHOOTING AND DYING ON MSX. ENJOY THE SELECTION </INTRO>



<!--- LOCOMALITO IS THE CREATIVE MIND BEHIND TOXIC TOMB. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

EL LOCO LOCOMALITO

<INTRO> MYSTERIOUS SPANISH DEVELOPER LOCOMALITO TALKS ABOUT TOXIC TOMB AND HOW HIS GAMES ARE INFLUENCED BY RETRO SYSTEMS </INTRO>

<BODY> **When he was younger, Locomalito's parents did not want him to get hooked on slot machines.** "I used to stand nearby to watch other people play arcade games. I ended up studying the design by observation. I used to write down what I had seen, add things I would have done differently and fantasise about making my own games," we're told.

Discovering GameMaker gave him that spark. "I use GameMaker as the main tool. For graphics, I used to use Iconomaker but some years ago I started using the excellent Aseprite," says Locomalito. Fellow Spaniard Gryzor87 creates music and sound. "We met at a dinner party organised by our partners, who have been friends since high school," Locomalito continues. "I'm always shy about showing my projects because people don't usually get it, but I ended up showing him a game I was working on which had no music or sound. A few days later he told me that he could compose the music, and we just started working together. It is quite easy for us to work together because we have a similar vision of games and other media."

The latest release from Locomalito is *Toxic Tomb*. "I usually have two types of projects: some that are big and need a lot of planning, and others that are smaller, where I allow myself to improvise on an idea," he says. "*Toxic Tomb* is the latter. I simply wanted to do something with bright colours and jellies in an industrial setting. I saw that it fit well with the aesthetics of the Master System, my first console. It started as a top-down dungeon crawler, but changed to side-scrolling because I wanted the chaotic feeling of jellies climbing and falling."

With that reveal in mind, could it become an actual Master System game? "I don't make ports for retro systems myself, but there are people crazy enough to make it possible," we're told. "It follows the specifications, even memory limits, so I think it

CRAZY CONVERSIONS

ENDLESS FORMS MOST BEAUTIFUL (C64)

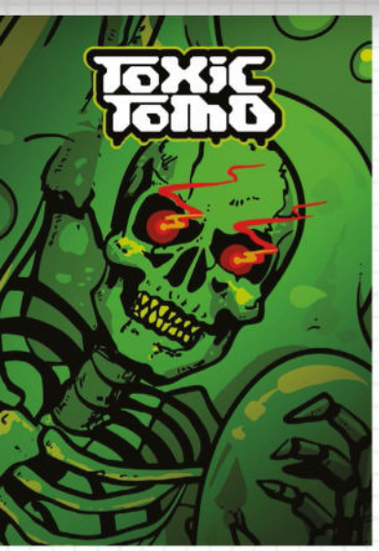
<Locomalito remade Dave Hughes' Spectrum *EFMB* for PC, and then this C64 update recreated the frantic platform gameplay. />

L'ABBAYE DES MORTS (ZX Spectrum)

<Originally inspired by Spectrum graphics, this excellent *DarkHorace* port was followed by MSX, C64 and three different Amiga adaptations. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**



<!--- [PC] THE ARCADE-STYLE SURROUND AND SCANLINES CAN BE SWITCHED ON OR OFF DEPENDING ON TASTE. --->

could be made – probably with a lot of flickering and slowdown." How does he feel about those Crazy Conversions we've mentioned (see panel) for various retro machines? "I love all of them," is the reply. "*L'Abbaye des Morts* for the ZX Spectrum – because it was for the actual system I was mimicking, and the Mega Drive version because it has many extras and a beautiful physical edition. *Mutants From The Deep* for the MSX because it's almost identical to the PC version… I love it when people adapt the games in a way that feels natural while keeping the essence of the game. That's what I consider a great port." With *Toxic Tomb* completed Locomalito is now focussing on smaller projects. "I have unfinished projects and ideas for puzzles, dungeon crawlers and racing games – and some ideas for games that look like arcades from the early Eighties." We look forward to playing them. </BODY>

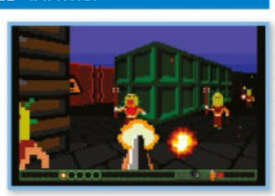
<INTRO> OUR FAVOURITE LOCOMALITO DEMAKES ON RETRO MACHINES </INTRO>

DARKULA
(Amstrad CPC)

Appearing at ArcadeCon 2019 in a dedicated cabinet, 21bloques brilliantly recreated the Eighties arcade action on the Amstrad. />

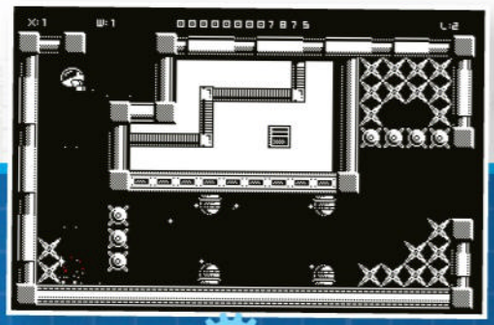
MUTANTS FROM THE DEEP
(MSX)

Manuel Pazos and Fernando Garcia skillfully took it back to its MSX roots – with RetroWorks publishing a limited-edition cartridge. />



8-BIT KILLER
(Amiga)

One of Locomalito's earliest titles, this gory first-person shooter was recreated on Amiga thanks to the Gloom engine. />



NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

Amiga: Hoffman's *Cecconoid* conversion (pictured) has arrived – we'll review it shortly. You can buy it from bit.ly/cecconoid-order />

Amstrad GX4000: *Oh Chute!* from Team Giraffe was released digitally, with a physical cartridge available to order. Float on over and name your price at bit.ly/ohchute />

Atari 8-bit: The puzzle game *Sudotris* offers three different modes to get stuck into. Get puzzling at bit.ly/sudotris />

Dreamcast: Good Deal Games has licensed *Flight Of The Amazon Queen*, with the manual featuring an exclusive interview with creator John Passfield. It's $29.99 for a professionally pressed game disc, or $39.99 for an additional soundtrack CD and you can order from gooddealgames.com />

Game Boy: Incube8 has released *Gunship DX* and *Genesis 2*, with plans to finally publish the Game Boy Advance title *KIEN* – a mix of platformer and RPG – after more than 20 years. Find out more at incube8games.com *Wink & The Broken Robot* (**RG** 237) is available to preorder – get it on digital download, cartridge only, and boxed edition at bit.ly/wink-preorder />

Master System: The superb *Wing Warriors* conversion is now available and it's absolutely free. Grab it by visiting bit.ly/wingwarriors />

PC: Oscar Celestini's superb *RoboCop Vs Predator* tie-in is free via bit.ly/rvsp-pc />

PET: Milasoft created an 8K version of Jim Summers' 1982 classic *Slimed*. Download it at bit.ly/slimed-pet8k />

PICO-8: Try some ghost *Bustin'* with Morning Toast bit.ly/bustin-pico8 and solve the *Puzzles Of The Paladin* via bit.ly/paladin-p8 />

PLUS/4: Beat the viruses with Haplo's *Binary Battle*, converted from the C64. Give it a try at bit.ly/binary-plus4 />

ZX Spectrum: Remember Colin Stewart's *Frank N Stein*? Get ready for the fiendish sequel, *Dr Acula* at bit.ly/dr-acula />

CHAMPION CODER

SHANNON BIRT

<INTRO> SHANNON IS PUSHING THE MEGA DRIVE'S GRAPHICS HARDWARE WITH SHOOT-'EM-UP LUFTHOHEIT </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: NEW ZEALAND WEBSITE: YOUTUBE.COM/@SHANNONBIRT9267 FORMAT: MEGA DRIVE/GENESIS PREVIOUS GAME: MEGA ARMALYTE (CANCELLED) WORKING ON: LUFTHOHEIT (MEGA DRIVE) />

WHAT GOT YOU INTO MEGA DRIVE CODING?

<When Stephane Dallongeville's SGDK became popular. In early 2023, I had some demos running in C, however, the horizontal interrupt needed very careful timing to do the mid-screen colour changes I wanted. Interrupt-driven colour changes were an under-utilised technique on the Mega Drive. I was keen to explore so I started to write in 68000 assembly. More of the codebase was transferred for speed/ease of optimisation. />

<!--- SHANNON BIRT WITH THE LUFTHOHEIT DEMO RUNNING BEHIND HIM. --->

WHAT INSPIRED LUFTHOHEIT?

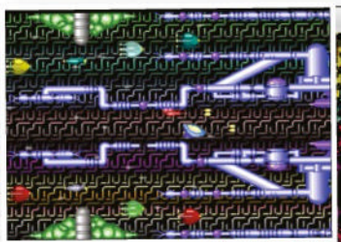
<I had a C64 for a few years, and thought about doing an *Armalyte* port. *Armalyte* used many technical tricks – sprite multiplexing, background tiles for bullets, etc, and *Mega Armalyte* was born. I was a little bit ignorant of copyright at the time and Thalamus asked me to discontinue it, which was disappointing. />

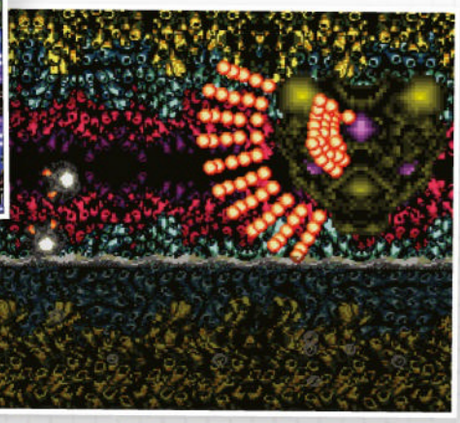
WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

<I am lucky to have musicians Cyan and Laurent Crouzet, and graphic artist/level designer Carsten Glaser onboard. Carsten had been cooking up a shoot-'em-up concept in his head for years and even had some graphics drawn! We decided to port the engine to Carsten's concept, *R-Type*/*Thunder Force* with bullet hell mixed in. Carsten floated the name *Lufthoheit*, broadly translated as *King Of The Sky*. />

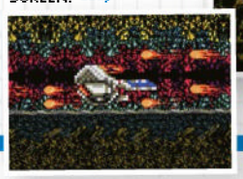
WHAT TECHNICAL TRICKS ARE USED IN THE GAME?

<*Lufthoheit* is heavily optimised in assembly for all object movement, in PAL and NTSC. Sprite multiplexing places up to 250 sprites (objects) on the screen, a big jump from the original hardware limit of 80. Active Colour Streaming techniques give more colours. Mid-screen colour changes 3 colours per scanline. Mid-screen DMA (direct memory access) changes up to 15 colours per scanline but must be used carefully. There are sprite scaling and sprite rotation effects and [we've used] Shadow and Highlight mode for the water effect as it can simulate transparency. The sound driver allows up to 4 PCM sound effects at once. We are aiming for a large ROM, using bank switching, to ensure no skimping on graphics or sound, to create the best shoot-'em-up we can. />





<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] THE ABANDONED MEGA ARMALYTE DEMO HAD UP TO 81 COLOURS AND LARGE NUMBERS OF SPRITES ON THE SCREEN. --->



<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] THE DEMO'S BOSS DRACO CAN FIRE UP TO 170 BULLETS. --->

DATA BURST

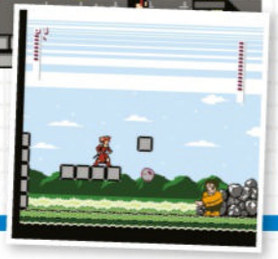
THE STORIED SWORD

<INFO BY: TEAM SWORD (JORDAN DAVIS, NATHAN TOLBERT)
FORMAT: NES PRICE: TBC (DEMO AVAILABLE)
VISIT: GAUAUU.ITCH.IO/THE-STORIED-SWORD />

<BODY> **Issue 247's homebrew section went behind the scenes of *The Storied Sword* during development, and now it is available to play after a successful Kickstarter campaign.** The floating citadel of evil sorcerer Vectre appeared off the Storm Coast, and now his forces are seeking the Storied Sword of legend. Two heroes stand in his way – the Candlemaster Cedric, and Orchid The Mourning. By switching between these two heroes, the player jumps and slashes their way through challenging levels filled with platforms, hazards, and dangerous enemies. Both heroes can perform a handy wall jump to climb higher, while sub-weapons can be thrown, with new varieties found in breakable jars. Defeated enemies drop extra ammo or hearts to restore energy so duff up as many as you can. Bosses can be found at the end of the game's six huge levels (which are split into multiple sections) and all have challenging attack patterns to master. Taking cues from Sunsoft's *Batman* and Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* as well as numerous famous films, *The Storied Sword* ramps up in difficulty as play continues and looks great throughout. The hilarious manual even includes a guide to local bird life (these can be a real pest in-game) as well as a handy recipe. Music and sound are excellent too, and there are subtle differences in how the characters handle. Sharpen your swords and get ready for a nostalgic and tricky challenge. </BODY>

SCORE: 87%

<!--- [NES] CEDRIC TACKLES THE CASTLE'S OPENING AREA.



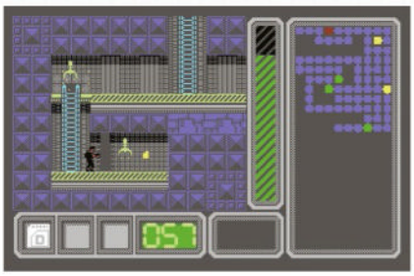
<!--- [NES] AFTER EACH LIFE, YOU CAN CHOOSE A DIFFERENT CHARACTER.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<!--- [C64] TIME YOUR JUMPS OVER THE SPEARS TO REACH THE FLAGPOLE IN GOODKNIIGHT. --->



<!--- [C64] BLAST THROUGH THE ALIENS AND PICK UP THE KEYCARD IN HARHARAGON. --->

GOOD KNIIGHT & HARHARAGON

<INFO FORMAT: C64 (DUAL CARTRIDGE, USB CASSETTE, C64 TAPE, DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) CREDITS: ICON64 FOR PSYTRONIK (STUART COLLIER, TREVOR STOREY, SAUL CROSS) PRICE: £34.99 (DUAL CARTRIDGE OR USB CASSETTE) / £8.99 EACH (INDIVIDUAL C64 TAPE) / $3.99 EACH (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) WEB: PSYTRONIK.BIGCARTEL.COM/ AND PSYTRONIK.ITCH.IO/ />

<BODY> **This cartridge compilation has two solid and entertaining games.** Good Kniight jumps across the battlements and collects flags as he tries to rescue the Princess from an evil dragon. Arrows, fireballs, men with spears and spinning blades are among the hazards, with swinging platforms helping you across spike-filled pits. This graphically fine update of *Hunchback* does feel dated in gameplay terms, despite some innovation. *Harharogan* sees our hero escaping a space prison by collecting parts of an escape pod. Key cards open locked doors and shooting enemies releases crystals to upgrade your gun (allowing certain walls to be blasted away). A sprawling map to explore can feel repetitive due to the necessary backtracking, but it looks stylish with its hi-res sci-fi graphics. </BODY>

SCORE: **78%**

<!--- [AMSTRAD 128 PLUS] FAMILIAR LANDMARKS INCLUDE ULURU IN AUSTRALIA. --->

<!--- [AMSTRAD 128 PLUS] THE LOVINGLY RECREATED MAP LETS YOU START FROM ANY OF THE GAME'S 17 STAGES. --->

PANG PLUS

<INFO FORMAT: AMSTRAD PLUS/GX4000 (CARTRIDGE DOWNLOAD) CREDITS: MOJON TWINS (SYX & REDANGEL) PRICE: FREE WEB: BIT.LY/PANGPLUS />

<BODY> **Ocean's cartridge conversion of *Pang* was considered a highlight of the GX4000's limited library, but the Mojon Twins have improved on it.** Graphical changes include the correct Mount Fuji, gorgeous colour effects to give different times of day, and other small improvements. Certain bugs have been fixed, with the correct music played in-game. However, the collision detection remains the same, which means it is still a challenge to make it through (but you can now start on any level on the map). This is worth checking out, whether you're a new or old fan of the game. </BODY>

SCORE: **89%**

PROCESSING

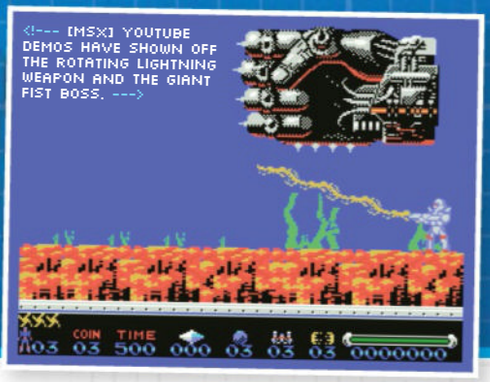
<INTRO> GIUSEPPE PINTUS IS BRINGING HIS FAVOURITE GAME, TURRICAN, TO THE MSX FOR THE FIRST TIME </INTRO>

<BODY> **A love for *Turrican* has led to Giuseppe Pintus converting it to the MSX.** "I started this in September 2021 and I'm trying to make it as close as possible to the original," we're told. "The main sprite is inspired by the Amiga [version], we have 5-way bullets, and background music throughout the game thanks to the MegaROM cartridge. It allows for a superb 128K speech sample at the beginning!"

Development is done with VSCode's Z80 extension, Glass Z80 assembler, graphic utilities (Magellan, GIMP, Paint and PyroPaint), and Tiled for map management. Charpad allowed Giuseppe to examine maps from the C64 version and both PAL and NTSC machines are supported. "The game draws the screen in different ways," explains Giuseppe – PAL machines have better bullet display, but NTSC has better sprite handling. Writing specific code for each type of enemy is quite challenging."

Giuseppe is hoping to complete the main code this summer. "I had permission to code *Turrican* from Julian Eggebrecht (Factor 5) since the first demo. If I won't be allowed to publish then I'll release the free demo and code another game using the engine." You can try out the demo at bit.ly/turrican-demo </BODY>

<!--- [MSX] TONI GALVEZ (GRAPHICS) AND BITCAFFE (MUSIC) WILL BE CONTRIBUTING TO THE FINISHED GAME. --->



<!--- [MSX] YOUTUBE DEMOS HAVE SHOWN OFF THE ROTATING LIGHTNING WEAPON AND THE GIANT FIST BOSS. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

» [GameCube] *Metroid Prime* wasn't the first 3D Metroidvania, but it remains one of the very best.

METROIDVANIA MAGIC

Exploring one of gaming's most popular design structures

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

» [Master System] *The Dragon's Trap* still holds up fantastically well, as the 2017 remake proved.

***uper Metroid* graces our cover this month.** With that in mind, it seemed high time to discuss our favourite games that use the series' signature exploration style – a large, fully connected map that is gated off according to the abilities you've picked up. But first, we discuss the name of the subgenre…

NICK

So before anything else, how do we all feel about 'Metroidvania' as a term?

DARRAN

I don't generally like the term as the *Castlevania* in question is clearly inspired by *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*, but it's sadly become so ubiquitous with a certain type of adventure game that even the mag uses it now.

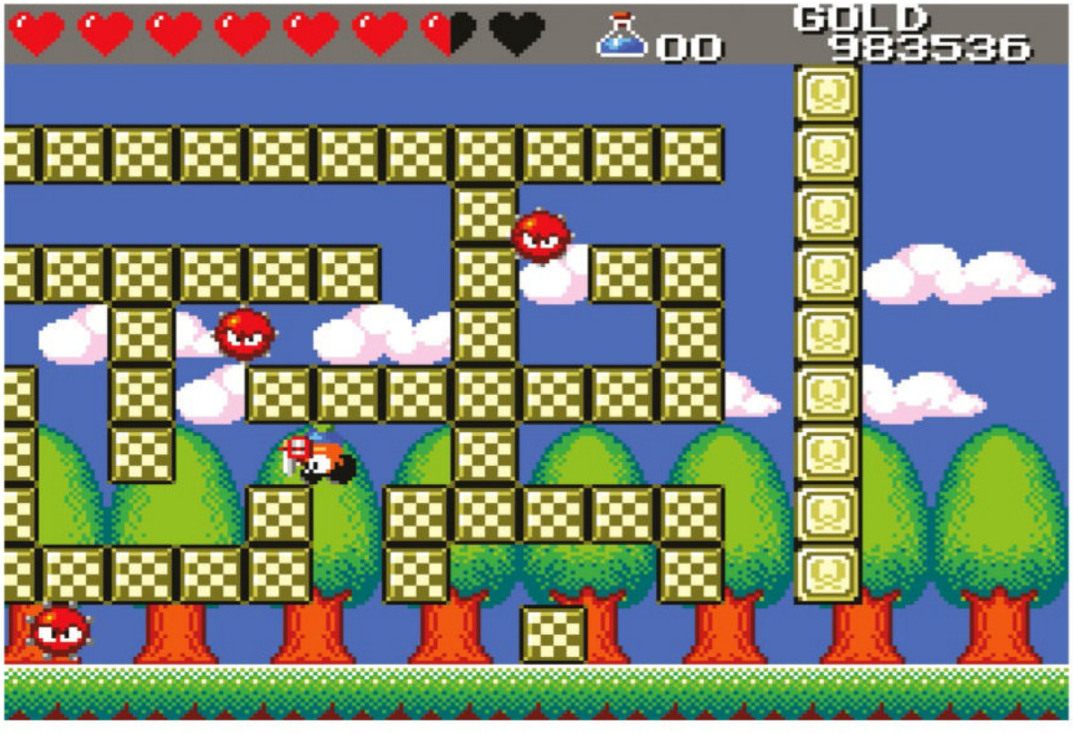
TIM

I'm fine with it, though I did have a to have a conversation about whether it should be capitalised in body text or not. And whether it should be italicised. Production editor fun!

DARRAN

We don't capitalise it do we? Now you're making me second-guess.

> "Metroidvanias weren't actually all that common in the heyday of games like Super Metroid"
>
> NICK THORPE



TIM

Yes it's capped up, no it's not italicised. Them's the rules!

NICK

Blimey, I hadn't even thought about that aspect of it. I just feel like genres shouldn't be named after games – we ditched '*Doom* clone' after all, though 'Roguelike' persists. But yes, *Wonder Boy III* is excellent, and definitely the first one I played, even if I didn't really recognise the style as anything unusual at the time.

DARRAN

My first was probably *The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad*, but I am bloody old. Although back then they were just called adventure games.

TIM

Oh! I played that, thought it was rather good. I'm honestly surprised the genre goes back that far as the first one I really remember playing was *Shadow Complex* on the Xbox 360.

DARRAN

Shadow Complex is a good shout, Tim. Decent game as well. Surely you played *Symphony Of The Night*?

TIM

Not at the time, and I still haven't played it much today.

DARRAN

Shocking stuff. It has a few difficulty spikes but it's an incredible game. There's plenty of ways to play it nowadays as well so you've got no excuse.

NICK

Yeah, the PlayStation version isn't so easy to grab but it's pretty widely available elsewhere now. That's an interesting point though – Metroidvanias weren't actually all that common in the heyday of games like *Super Metroid* and *Symphony Of The Night*. Why do you think they're so popular now?

DARRAN

Maybe because they can offer pretty sprawling gameplay, but can be done on relatively smaller budgets? You don't really get too many big-budget Metroidvania games, but they're hugely prevalent within indie circles. You've only got to read this month's *Super Metroid* feature to see that.

TIM

Yeah it's probably that, I've played quite a few indie ones such as *Gato Roboto* and *Dust: An Elysian Tail*.

DARRAN

Ah, I've played *Dust*. *Yoku's*

Island Express is also a cool little variant that splices things with pinball of all things. I've also played the likes of *The Messenger*, *Blasphemous*, *Ender Lilies*, *Guacamelee!*, *Ori And The Blind Forest*, *Iconoclasts*, *Monster Boy And The Cursed Kingdom* and most recently, *Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown*. I clearly enjoy the genre.

NICK

The Lost Crown is absolutely fantastic. Weirdly, it's so good that it has restored my interest after a glut of Metroidvanias, but also almost spoiled me on them. I played *Yohane The Parhelion: Blaze In The Deepblue* shortly after finishing it, and it's a good enough game but I wish I'd left more time between them.

DARRAN

I agree on *The Lost Crown*, it really was a polished game and it's a shame that its low sales means we'll probably not get a sequel. It's worth mentioning *Metroid Dread* as well here, just because of all the discourse *The Lost Crown* received about cost when *Dread* didn't, but I like that we're not really focussing on *Metroid* and Castlevania games here.

TIM

I recently completed *FIST: Forged In Shadow Torch*, that was pretty good too. I am looking forward to playing *The Lost Crown* after Darran went on and on about it.

DARRAN

I'm pretty sure I didn't go on about it as much as Nick did… You waiting for that sweet Game Pass drop, Tim?

TIM

Yep, that and *Star Wars Jedi: Survivor* – they're bound to come at some point.

DARRAN

Ooh, *Jedi: Survivor* is a good shout, although it's probably get elements of *Dark Souls* to it as well no? We don't really get AAA games in this format anymore, right? *Batman: Arkham Asylum* is a good example and you can make an argument that *God Of War* from 2018 dips into the genre, but they're pretty rare in the field of big-budget games.

» [PC] Director Sefton Hill has confirmed that *Batman: Arkham Asylum* was directly influenced by *Metroid*.

NICK

Not helped by the fact that *Metroid Prime 4* seems to be stuck in development hell.

DARRAN

Good shout, wasn't that first announced in 1627?

TIM

Huh, *Metroid Prime* was the first *Metroid* game I ever played. It was glorious. So a new one would be amazing.

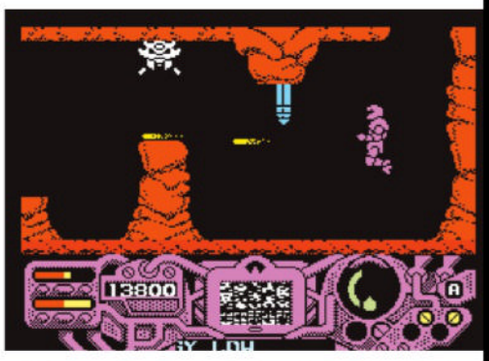
DARRAN

It was pretty special, and it also had a famously tortuous development so maybe *Metroid Prime 4* is going through the same process?

NICK

It certainly could be. Then again, it might just be that they've been locked out of the office and can't find the missiles they need to get back in. Who knows?

» [PlayStation] Secrets like never having played *Symphony Of The Night*, apparently. Is it on Game Pass yet?



» [ZX Spectrum] It's amazing that *The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad* and *Metroid* arrived at similar times, from totally different design traditions.

» [Switch] *Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown* is awesome. Please try it, if you haven't already done so.

READERS REACT

What is your favourite Metroidvania?

Zahir Hassan
It's a bit of a modern indie game but I really enjoyed *Life On Mars* on the Sega Genesis due to the tension and the horrors that our protagonist needed to face all by himself.

Graham Hanks
Ori And The Will Of The Wisps, not only one of the most beautiful games of all time but has amazing music, tight controls, solid map design and platforming. It's a consistent treat from start to finish. There may have been tears at the end, I'm confirming nothing.

PicattaTatta
Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap. Just a brilliant game, and not only do you get new abilities, but a whole new charismatic sprite when you make progress in the game. Numerous times! More of an event than getting a bomb or whatever.

Bens Jammin
Cathedral on Evercade has definitely been the best one for me. Manages to blend the modern and retro together perfectly.

June
A few months ago I would've said *Symphony Of The Night* but honestly *Pseudoregalia*'s stolen my heart as of late. Insanely fun movement, I spent like half an hour sequence breaking without even realising.

Dale Muir
Always *Super Metroid* for me, but I'm playing through all the *Castlevanias* for the first time. Just finished *Dawn Of Sorrow* which was pretty amazing!

Lee Abrahams
Symphony Of The Night is probably the greatest, but I think *Hollow Knight* is a modern equivalent – plus a very beautiful and melancholy game in its own right.

Thomas Marshall
Aliens Infestation. Absolute must play, also kinda ironic in that *Metroid* was inspired by *Alien*.

The Spriters Resource
Monster Tale on the DS was an extremely underrated title; released exclusively in the United States, it introduced a pet raising mechanic and switched the typically adult themes of the genre to appeal to a wider, family friendly audience. Very charming pixel art included!

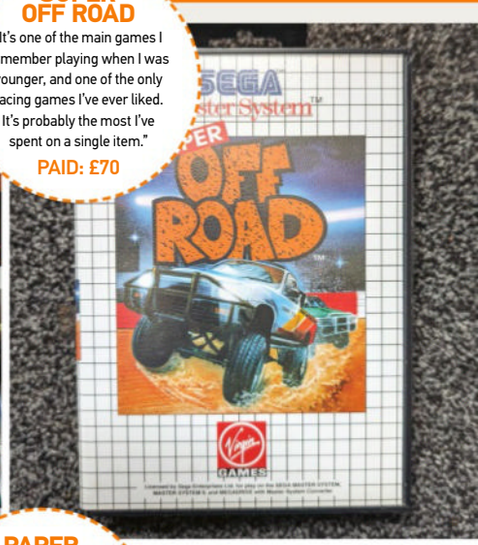
John Lombardo
I think *Blasphemous* is right up there with both the modern and retro classics.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

SONIC 3
"That's another really good bargain. I got that for £5 last year, because in a shop in King's Lynn, they'd priced it up as *Sonic The Hedgehog 1*."
PAID: £5

SUPER OFF ROAD
"It's one of the main games I remember playing when I was younger, and one of the only racing games I've ever liked. It's probably the most I've spent on a single item."
PAID: £70



PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND YEAR DOOR
"This is the one that led my wife to decide that it was *our* collection."
PAID: £97.97

BIO

NAME:
Tom Turner

LOCATION:
Norwich, UK

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
£10,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Mega Drive

FAVOURITE GAME:
Sonic The Hedgehog 2 / Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge

INSTAGRAM:
@Digitalmonkery

PLAYING CO-OP

This month's collector isn't going it alone

Like many gamers, Tom Turner got into the hobby early in life. "When I was quite young, after one of my parents died, I spent a lot of time with my uncle who was only about eight years older than me and we spent a lot of time playing point-and-click games on his Atari ST," he tells us. "When I was probably about nine the first console I owned that was mine was the Sega Master System II with *Sonic The Hedgehog* built into it."

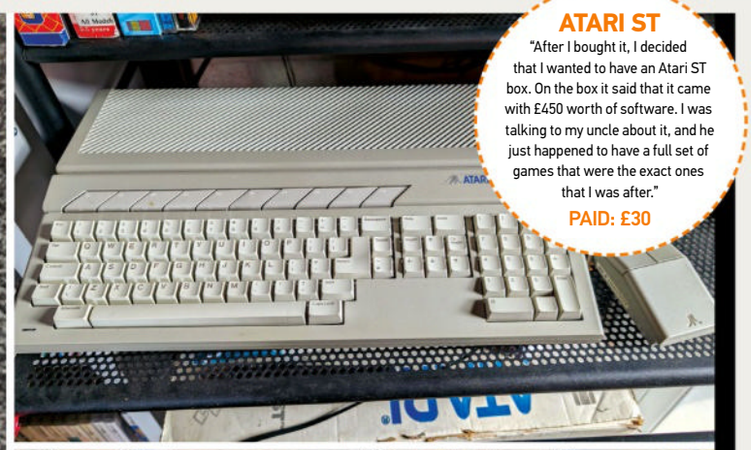
Going into adulthood, that naturally developed into collecting. "One of my ambitions when I was 10 was to have a Sega Mega Drive and 50 games. I did that in my early 20s, then without really trying, built up a collection." This would fluctuate with major life events, in particular when children came along, but the hobby took an unexpected twist recently. "I was talking to my wife just over a year ago, and she mentioned *Thousand Year Door* on the GameCube. And just as a passing comment, I went yeah, if you get that for under 100 quid you're doing well. And by the end of the week, it turned up in the collection. She spent £97.97 on it. Suddenly it was *our* collection."

Tom says that his wife is an avid bargain hunter, explaining that as well as eBay and Vinted, "She's very big on going to car boots and going to the recycling centres because we've got some really good shops attached to recycling centres near us, and they have so many retro consoles and so many retro games are a pound each." Any highlights to share? "I paid £30 for a Dreamcast in immaculate condition with two games and a third-party fishing rod controller. I paid about 30 quid for my Atari ST, again immaculate condition with a few games."

While the couple collect games across a variety of platforms, Tom says that they've had to set certain limits. "We've kind of both come up with a list of our priority games for the year, but we're only allowed to buy one if we complete a game," he explains. "She's currently aiming for a full Wii U collection, she's got about 110 of 160-odd at the moment. But we've tied her Wii U collection and my Mega Drive collection with our weight loss this year. So if we lose a pound we're allowed a game."

Is Tom similarly close to finishing any sets? "The dream for me would be a complete Mega Drive collection, but I know that that is far and away beyond what my finances would ever allow, so I'm looking in terms of subsets within that collection. For example, I'm only one away from having the complete Disney collection on the Mega Drive," he says. "For the Master System, the ones I'm specifically going for are the ones that I had when I was younger." Still, with a thousand games and counting, he's unlikely to run out of things to play anytime soon.

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com



ATARI ST

"After I bought it, I decided that I wanted to have an Atari ST box. On the box it said that it came with £450 worth of software. I was talking to my uncle about it, and he just happened to have a full set of games that were the exact ones that I was after."

PAID: £30

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

MONKEY ISLAND COLLECTION

■ "The first two are games that I complete every year. I want to get the big box versions for the Atari ST. The Collectors Edition of *Tales Of Monkey Island*, I bought the week that my first child was born to play while I was on paternity leave."

PAID: £13

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

SUPER METROID

Loose PAL copies of Samus' third adventure tend to run between **£30** to **£60,** and boxed copies can go anywhere between **£120** to **£330** depending on condition. Prices elsewhere aren't much better, so it may be worth exploring a SNES Classic Mini or Switch Online to play it.

CALIFORNIA GAMES

The lead C64 version can be had for **£6** to **£17** on tape. Big box Amiga copies are **£30+** but the Kixx version may be less. It's rarely more than **£10** on the Master System, while the decent Mega Drive version is slightly pricier and ranges from **£10** to **£20.**

CAPTAIN BLOOD

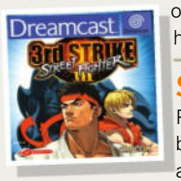
The original Atari ST release sells for **£10** to **£25.** The Amiga version is about the same, but the alternate art Mindscape version can reach **£50.** The 8-bit cassette versions are much cheaper and you should be able to find copies for no more than **£5.**

STAR TREK: 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Fans of the Skywalker saga will be pleased to know that PC CD-ROM copies of this start at just **£3,** with floppy disk versions hitting **£20.** The Amiga floppy disk version is a similar price.

RAPID RELOAD

We've seen PAL copies of this PlayStation cult favourite go as high as **£300,** and even a loose disc sold for **£100.** Darran's choice of the Japanese version *Gunner's Heaven*, which has recently sold for **£60,** was a smart one.



STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE

PAL and US Dreamcast copies of Capcom's sensational brawler have been selling for a knockout **£50** to **£150** lately. Japanese copies are around **£20** to **£45,** and Japanese PS2 copies hit **£30.** Check out *Street Fighter Anniversary* compilations old and new for a much cheaper alternative.

BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN

Criterion's classic arcade racer certainly won't wreck your wallet – it's a cheap, common game that is frequently found in bundles. Whether you're playing on PlayStation 2 or Xbox, **£5** to **£10** is the price you should look to pay.

HOW MUCH?!

TECHNOS COLLECTION 1

The tenth Evercade cartridge is now out of print, and collectors are pushing prices to some shockingly high levels for a retro compilation released in the last five years. Complete used copies are already selling for **£50** to **£150,** with sealed copies at a shocking **£150** to **£230.** Maybe that licence is worth renewing?

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

RETRO IN WROCLAW

Darran gets a taste of Polish retro gaming

Back in November 2023, my wife Melanie and I went on a city break to Wroclaw in Poland. Mel loves old architecture and was also keen to visit Wroclaw's popular Christmas Market, so she made plans that would keep us busy for the two full days we were there.

As it turned out we were able to see everything she wanted to view in around five hours – the place was a lot smaller than we anticipated – so we looked for other things we could do to kill some time. As luck would have it, there was a museum dedicated to retro games just 25 minutes from our hotel, so we decided to give it a visit.

Gry I Komputery (gikme.pl) is a fantastic place to visit if you're ever in Wroclaw. It also does a brilliant job of adding some context to what Polish videogaming was like during the Eighties and Nineties. Certain areas of the museum were actually designed to look like bedrooms from their respective time periods and they all included various Polish gaming magazines, posters and era-appropriate TVs and boom boxes. I couldn't understand the magazines, but they were interesting to look through with some inventive and interesting spreads.

As I walked around the museum the main thing that struck me was just how prevalent cloned consoles and home computers were, something I hadn't really experienced in the UK. I had never heard of the Alice home computer before I visited this amazing time capsule, but it was apparently a clone of the TRS-80 MC-10 and was very popular in France. Other interesting systems included the Robotron KC 85 (the KC means Kleincomputer or small computer) from East Germany and the Japanese Sord M23P. It wasn't too clear how many of these were readily available in Poland on release, but they were fascinating to look at, and while a great many systems were behind glass, plenty more were available to play.

> "Display highlights included a lovely wall of lightguns"
> **DARRAN JONES**

***Quake* was available on a couple of PCs, *Mickey Mania* was the game of choice on the Mega Drive, you could play *Tetris* on a Famiclone system that was connected to a cool miniature Spider-Man TV and there were also a few arcade games, including *Metal Slug* and *Tekken* to enjoy.** Mel played *Pac-Man* on the C64, I watched a young couple enjoy a game of *Pong* and witnessed Melanie struggling with the first stage of *Disney's Aladdin*. I was happy just to look at all the interesting hardware that were on display, but the owners clearly knew that letting its customers play the systems was a big bonus.

Speaking of which, the museum was fairly busy and felt reasonably priced at just over £13 for a couple of hours for the pair of us. The staff were incredibly helpful and did their best to explain some of the history behind both the museum and the general culture of Polish retro gaming, while many of the displays had small descriptions in both Polish and English. I was really impressed with the displays and it was clear that a lot of thought and attention had gone into how each one would look.

Display highlights included a lovely wall of lightguns and bizarre peripherals, a gallery of esteemed developers including Jordan Mechner, Eric Chahi and Paul Cuisset and a giant glass cabinet filled with classic retro games and toys from the Seventies and Eighties. Videogame art was on display wherever you looked and there were some amazing displays of early Apple systems as well.

Another pleasing aspect of the museum was how well everything seemed to be maintained. Everything we tried was working exactly how it should and the machines and games were obviously well looked after. It was a genuinely lovely place to visit.

While we've covered gaming in other parts of the world, including Poland, thanks to John Szczepaniak's *Global Gaming* series, it's still great to experience this culture for yourself. We spent the following day at Wroclaw's world-famous zoo, but our time at Gry I Komputery was equally enjoyable and I'd certainly go there again. ✱

MUSEUM HIGHLIGHTS

THE NEW THINGS I EXPERIENCED

ALICE HOME COMPUTER
I never knew this existed before visiting the museum and enjoyed learning more about it. It also shares the same name as my daughter.

POLISH HANDHELD GAMES
I saw a number of toy mechanical games including a football game and a fruit machine game.

TIMEX COMPUTER 2048
Any computer that shares part of *Robotron*'s name gets instant interest from me.

ACTION MAX
We've covered this in the magazine, but I've never seen one in real life before.

AN ANCIENT PHONE
I've no idea of the make or model of this device, but was fascinated by its numerous dials and knobs. It must have been a nightmare to use.

I LIKED HOW AREAS OF THE MUSEUM WERE MADE TO LOOK LIKE OLD POLISH BEDROOMS.
SHOOTING GALLERY
I REALLY LIKED HOW THESE LIGHTGUNS WERE DISPLAYED.
LOOK AT THIS SUPER DISPLAY OF HANDHELDS. SOME WERE EVEN AVAILABLE TO PLAY ON.

I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE OF THESE BEFORE.
THE NUMBER OF HOME COMPUTERS AT THE MUSEUM WAS STAGGERING.
MEL GETS HANDS-ON WITH PAC-MAN.
I'D LOVE TO HAVE A FEW OF THESE MONITORS IN MY RETRO SHED.
WHILE THERE WAS A BIG FOCUS ON HOME COMPUTERS, THERE WERE STILL PLENTY OF CONSOLES.
THERE WAS A LARGE SELECTION OF CALCULATORS ON DISPLAY, AS WELL AS VHS CASSETTES.

MUST-VISIT MUSEUMS

Readers share their favourite gaming museums

Martin
Darran's shed.

Lord Arse
The Ramsgate Micro Museum. Just a wonderful place, and the owners are lovely people as well. If you're in the Thanet area, I highly recommend a visit.

John Walker
@nvmuk in Sheffield. I enjoyed the wall for *Space Invaders* too.

Tony Temple
@Arcade_Archive and @RMCRetro are genuinely doing something different here in the UK. A great setup there and well worth a visit. Overseas, I'd recommend @Arcade_Museum and @museumofplay

Arjan Kooij
The Nationaal Videogame Museum in Zoetermeer, the Netherlands. It has an awesome collection for a fixed price. There are hundreds of unique consoles and arcade machines that are all playable.

Reit Zephyrox
Without a doubt @Arcade_Vintage in Ibi, Spain. It's filled to the brim with amazing pieces of videogame history, arcades and consoles.

Mark
The Pixel Museum in Brussels had just about any console I could think of on display. An essential visit if you're ever in the city.

David Autovino
@museumofplay in Rochester NY has gotta be one of the world's foremost institutions dedicated to the preservation, archiving, and displaying of important artefacts from videogame history.

Mirek
Cibien's Corner in Prague was fantastic when I went a few years back, it has moved location now and looks even bigger!

Zahir Hassan
The Retro Video Game Museum in Sydney, Australia. It's a small one, but it showcased many consoles that we had enjoyed during our childhood times.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

STAR LETTER

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

» The term 'console' was in use in the UK as early as 1981, though it was used differently.

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I have a bit of an odd question that I'm hoping you can help me with. When I was growing up, we didn't use the term 'console' – even when the machines we were talking about were consoles, we'd call them 'computers' and 'computer games' likewise. The term 'console' always felt like an Americanism.

That got me to thinking, where does the term 'games console' actually come from? Also, when did we start using 'console' regularly in the UK?

Regards,

Jay

The earliest uses of the term that we could find relate to the Fairchild Channel F. The original Fairchild Video Entertainment System box refers to the "Standard Console Features" and while the November 1976 issue of *Popular Science* refers to the likes of the Magnavox Odyssey and *Pong* clone consoles as "TV games" it specifically uses the term "game console" to refer to Fairchild's machine.

As for usage in the UK, when *Computer & Video Games* launched in 1981, its preferred term was "TV games centre," but its coverage of MB's Microvision repeatedly used "console" in reference to the device. Interestingly, Maplin adverts referred to the Atari 400 and 800 computers as "consoles" so it seems as though a distinction had yet to be truly established. The terminology remained inconsistent as computers took over in the mid-Eighties, but 'console' was definitely in use by the time the Mean Machines section launched in 1987.

That was a fantastic question, and one that inspired a bit of digging – have a bookazine for your trouble.

» The Fairchild Channel F was a system of many firsts, and apparently an etymological one too.

BUBBLE BURST

Good afternoon,

Through all my years of gaming from the late-Seventies to current day I have never emailed or written in before to any mag, whether it be *Micro User*, *Zzap!64*, *Amiga Format*, *CVG* or any of the plethora of games mags I have enjoyed reading over the years.

I thought now is as good a time as any and I just couldn't let this go. I appreciate 'greatest' lists are always going to be subjective. I do not, for example, like JRPGs but I can appreciate their appeal to someone who enjoys the genre.

However it seems unless I am mistaken and need an eye test that the legendary *Bubble Bobble* is omitted from your The 100 Greatest Retro Games list?! Do not think that listing *Rainbow Islands* in any way makes up for this, it does not!

Kudos for having *Elite* in the top ten where it belongs but *Bubble Bobble* needs to be there too! Whilst I'm at it, *The NewZealand Story* is better than many of the games on your list.

Talking of mistakes (we are all human after all) can I also mention that on page 102 Antoine Fantys very much looks like he's holding an LT and not a PC Engine GT as it says under his picture. Either that or my GT has been horribly scarred in a marathon sesh of *Splatterhouse* and *Devil Crash*. Keep up the good work gents and let me know if you need a new tea boy who is nuts about retro games.

Tonka

We're glad that you enjoyed the issue Tonka, even if the top 100 didn't quite match your expectations. That's democracy for you, isn't it? *Bubble Bobble* was pretty close to making the top 100, ranking 119th, behind *Final Fight* and ahead of *Duke Nukem 3D* – it was a tough contest. Also, that was indeed a PC Engine LT – good spot.

IMPOSSIBLE POSITION

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

First of all congratulations on reaching your milestone. Here's to another 20 years. I would however like to point out an omission in your top 100. I expected C64 *Impossible Mission* to be in the top five, however it does not appear at all in the list. A game 40 years old, that has never been bettered in its genre. A game without compare. Dennis Caswell was the next coming of Jesus for what he produced.

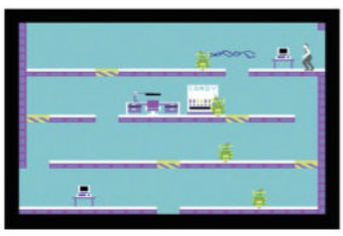
Anyway, I forgive you. Keep up the fantastic work.

PS A quick shout out as well to Mark Smith, who has just released part 500 of his "Battle Of The Ports". A great guy.

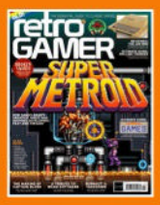
John Ebbs

Thanks for the kind words, John. If it's any comfort, *Impossible Mission* came even closer to making the top 100

» [Arcade] *Bubble Bobble* – not quite top 100 material, according to voters. 119th is still pretty good going though.



» [C64] John's forgiven us for this classic not being in our top 100, but we're not the only ones that need forgiveness – they were also your votes, after all.



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than *Bubble Bobble* did, placing 103rd overall. Interestingly, the game received more of its votes from game developers than the readership at large.

STEREOSCOPIC SOLICITATION

Dear **Retro Gamer**

I'm just wondering if you have ever done an issue covering the 3DS? If not, then it would be amazing if you did, considering that the device has (or had, RIP eShop) an excellent library, great access to older Nintendo games with the Virtual Console, and an incredible homebrew community that have been able to get a considerable amount of your list of The 100 Greatest Retro Games to run on it, as well as more recent games too.

Overall, I hope that you cover the 3DS in some capacity in a future issue – and if you do, please mention the homebrew community.

Ismail

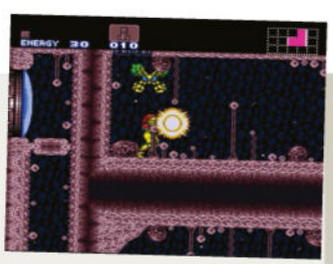
Thanks for the suggestion, Ismail. We normally start covering machines once they turn 15 years old, which isn't far away for the 3DS. Once it does grace our pages, you can bet we'll be enthusing about everything from homebrew to the much-missed StreetPass.

» There's something about that clamshell design that just hits a little different today.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Careful collecting

Nick's practically brought his gaming spending to zero lately, in large part because he's got an expensive summer ahead. Darran's been back on the handheld hunt, but he's been questioning his long-held standards, wondering whether he can really justify going for complete boxed games given the premium they now command. He's also worried about whether or not he's about to dive back into collecting Lynx games, the exact same way he did a decade ago.



» [SNES] Charging up to blast some enemies in Nintendo's *Super Metroid*.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Super Metroid memory?

Rev Phil Richardson
Where to even start? The sheer freedom of exploring however you want to, the 'come back to this bit when you've found the upgrade' progression mechanic, or perhaps the banging soundtrack!

Thomas Marshall
The end battle. The Metroid in its last act giving you the power to defeat Mother Brain.

Sean Coughlan
Whenever I start the game I always forget that there's a run button until I reach the room with the security shutters. Holding B and seeing Samus sprinting under them just in time still looks and feels awesome.

Sam Cushing
Getting the big box version with the guide from Woolworths, literally a day after reading *Super Play*'s review. The only game I've ever played that I've got 100% of all the collectibles, missile packs etc.

Tox
When you get to Brinstar and that sick tune starts playing in the elevator on your way down.

AttemptingNo LandingThere
Using the Power Bomb to smash the glass corridor and open up Maridia. Brilliant use of visual hints in game design.

Jose Manuel Suarez
The first arc is pure art. That feeling of facing the unknown as you walk through a laboratory with the bodies of scientists on the floor and then Ridley hiding in the shadows with the last Metroid in his claws. Chef's kiss.

Ross
Getting lost lots, and actually being OK about it.

Phil Halliwell
Four words. Tiny The Friendly Metroid.

E
As a Genesis fan, this was the one SNES game that I was jealous of.

retro GAMER

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The Beatles: Rock Band

TOO NEW FOR REVIEW

» XBOX 360 » 2009 » HARMONIX

As you're probably aware, we don't have the biggest reviews section. The reason for that should be obvious – the strength of **Retro Gamer** is in its behind-the-scenes features, not its reviews of modern games. And yet there have often been times when I've desperately wanted to cover new games which I feel *would* be of interest to **Retro Gamer** readers and *The Beatles: Rock Band* was certainly one of them.

Generally, our rule for review coverage is new games with retro mechanics/aesthetics or sequels/remasters of established classic franchises like *Resident Evil* and *Super Mario Bros*. Space plays a part too, which is one of the main reasons you'd rarely see *Call Of Duty* or *FIFA* games reviewed inside the magazine. So with a little context you can see why *The Beatles: Rock Band* never made the cut.

I'd genuinely love to speak to Harmonix about how its game came together as it's arguably the most ambitious thing the studio has ever created. I can only imagine the intense legal wrangling that was going on behind the scenes to acquire the staggering number of tracks that made it into the final game and the hoops that had to be jumped through so the likenesses of all The Beatles could be officially approved.

Personally, I think the cartoony aesthetic Harmonix went for is absolutely fantastic and some of the locations and dream sequences are emotionally impactful as a fan of the band. Mechanically it's every bit as good as you'd expect and all the available instruments feel satisfying and challenging to play (many of my hardcore music friends feel it's actually a little on the easy side but I've always found it quite tough).

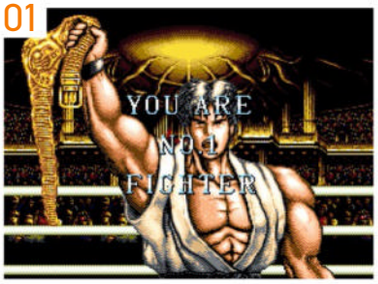
Ultimately, *The Beatles: Rock Band* is a meticulously crafted love letter to one of the most influential and respected bands of all time and it's a shame that we didn't see more of these band-focussed projects from Harmonix (*Green Day: Rock Band* was the only other release). Having said that, how on earth do you top The Beatles?

ENDGAME

DEADLY MOVES

» You remember *Deadly Moves*, don't you? It's only the 82nd most popular fighting game of the early Nineties. To combat the choice paralysis presented by *Street Fighter II* and *Fatal Fury*, *Deadly Moves* only lets you play as a bloke called Joe. He's entered a contest involving a lot of punching – let's see what happens to him and his opponents at the end of it.

01



» Joe has won the punching contest! Now he is the best puncher, and has a big gold belt to prove that he is better at punching than everybody else. Really, who could want more from life than a big gold belt?

02

» Reayon gave up fighting and decided to go into textiles, having created a semi-synthetic material that she named after herself. Unfortunately, she quickly found out that rayon had already been on sale since 1905.

03

» Ranker gave up fighting and decided to follow the natural talent his name hinted at, producing the kind of tier list videos that everyone thinks are lazy but everyone does. He soon changed his name to Gary YouTube.

04

» Nick gave up fighting too. Legend has it that he sought a quieter life, and so moved to the south of England where he began to write about old videogames. That sounds suspiciously familiar, but we stopped asking about that after *our* Nick broke a *Real Puncher* machine by punching it.

05

» Hang on, has everyone just given up fighting now then? That would explain the functional and intact state of the city. That would be a bit boring for Joe though, right? Not at all. He also gave up fighting, and took up busking with bagpipes. "I can hurt more people quicker this way," he said.

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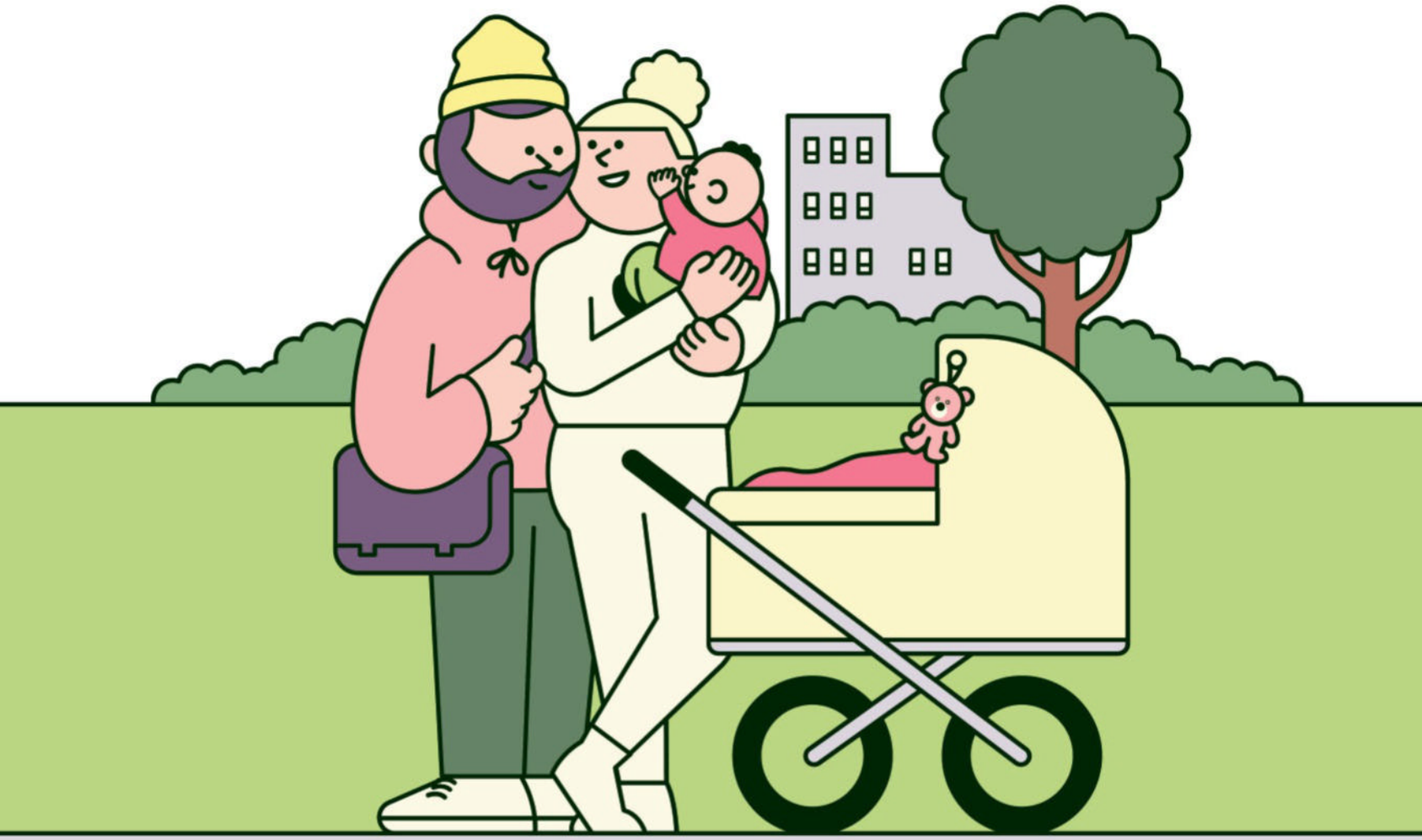

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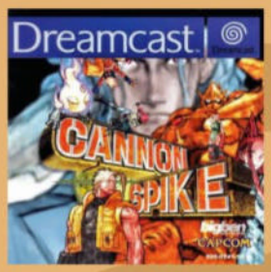

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